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ABSTRACT

The experiences of 11 innovative public policy education projects funded by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation between 1988 and 1992 are reviewed. It presents results of a cluster evaluation that used a case study approach to examine effective public policy education and the role of coalitions. The report begins with project descriptions that include a summary of the issues addressed, the policy arena in which the issues would be decided, audience, and coalition membership. Projects are as follows: the Global Food Web, Iowa Public Policy Education Project, Agriculture and Food Policy in an Interdependent World, Restructuring the Upper Midwest, Northeast Network Project, Partners in Natural Resource Policy, Groundwater Public Policy Education Project, Policy Options and Strategies for Total Community Adjustment, Communicating America's Farm Policy, Trade and Development Program, and Food Forum Education Project. Findings are presented in the forms of 21 lessons. Each lesson is accompanied by a discussion of the evidence supporting it and its implications; many are further illustrated by vignettes drawn from individual projects. Three longer case studies of individual projects are included. The report concludes with reflections on projects' experiences in light of continuing developments in the practice of public policy education in these areas: coalition building, implementation of educational programs, and impacts of education about public issues. Appended is a description of the methodology. Contains 30 references. (YLB)

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A Cornell Cooperative Extension Publication

EDUCATING ABOUT PUBLIC ISSUES

Lessons from Eleven Innovative Public Policy Education Projects

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INTRODUCTION

Our political system is in trouble. The most obvious symptom is voter turnout, which, despite an upturn in 1992, is much lower than it was in 1960. That trend has been accompanied by declining trust in government and belief that public officials care what citizens think. At the same time, growing concern—approaching anger—about persistent and multiplying public problems seems matched only by the inability of policymakers to solve them. Policymakers seem trapped by special interests and absence of public support. Involvement in policy-making has narrowed to an "iron triangle" of legislators, bureaucrats, and interest groups that is increasingly polarized in ideological ways (see, e.g., Ginsberg and Shefter 1990; Dionne 1991). Any decision by policymakers produces costly enemies, and the public is not there to back anyone up.

There is, however, a growing desire for change. Recent studies relying on focus groups or qualitative interviews (Sanders 1990; Harwood 1991) indicate that citizens are tired of negative campaigns and the politics of "sound bites." They say they want to know more about issues and how they affect "me and the people I care about." People avoid politics partly because they see organizing and fighting as the only way to get involved effectively, and they are uncomfortable with that style of politics. They understand that issues are complicated, and they want to know what the tradeoffs are. They want a policy-making process they can trust. They hope for policies that satisfy their self-interests, but tell interviewers that fairness to others is a more important standard for judging proposals and outcomes (Hochschild 1981; Sanders 1990).

Clearly, people recognize the need to find better ways to make public policy decisions, and educators have a potentially important role to play. Cooperative Extension has recently adopted a national policy statement and "action agenda" in support of increased education about public issues (Extension Committee on Organization and Policy and Extension Service, USDA 1992; Cooperative Extension System Task Force on Public Issues Education 1993), and several state extension organizations have adopted similar statements. A series of national videoconferences on public issues education has been produced (Dale 1993), and new printed materials have been developed to support in-service education (Public Issues Education Materials Task Force 1994). Meanwhile, other organizations such as the Kettering Foundation, Study Circles Resource Center, and Project Public Life continue to develop and promote opportunities for education about public issues (McAfee, McKenzie, and Mathews n.d.; Project Public Life n.d.; Study Circles Resource Center 1993).

It thus seems timely to review the experiences of eleven innovative public policy education projects funded by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation in collaboration with the Farm Foundation between 1988 and 1992. The foundations' purpose in supporting the projects was to "strengthen or develop ongoing public policy education programs and involve more people and institutions in discussions of agricultural and rural issues" (W. K. Kellogg Foundation and Farm Foundation, "Opportunities for Innovative Public Policy Education Program Development," September 1987). A key stipulation was that proposals had to come from a coalition of two or more organizations to "insure that the best information available is brought to bear on policy decisions. . .help assure that a variety of perspectives is represented, [and]. . .increase the potential for continuity of the programs after the termination of Kellogg funding." Each project was required to conduct its own evaluation, but the foundation also funded a separate, comparative, "cluster evaluation" to look across the projects to see what could be learned about effective public policy education and the role of coalitions. This report is the result of that evaluation.

The cluster evaluation used a case study approach. We learned about the projects mainly from periodic site visits—relying heavily on interviews with project staff, coalition members, and participants in project events; observations of selected planning meetings and educational activities; and review of proposals, annual reports, evaluation studies, and other project documents. We sought, first, to understand the story of each project's genesis, implementation, challenges, and successes, and, second, via comparative analyses of these individual stories, to extract broader understandings of key elements of effective public policy education. (See the appendix for a more detailed discussion of our methodology.)

All data were collected using approved procedures for protecting the privacy of the human participants. Specifically, all respondents were offered full information about the evaluation and their participation in it, were asked for

their voluntary participation, and were assured that their individual responses would be kept wholly confidential. At the stage of writing this report, all project directors were contacted and asked for permission to use actual organizational names. All eleven projects granted permission to do so. Nevertheless, individual identities remain confidential; all references to individuals employ pseudonyms, and most are a composite portrait of several individuals.

The report begins with a descriptive introduction to the eleven projects. Findings are then presented in the form of twenty-one lessons. Each lesson is accompanied by a discussion of the evidence supporting it and its implications. Many lessons are further illustrated by vignettes drawn from individual projects. Three longer case studies of individual projects are also included. The report concludes with reflections on these projects' experiences in light of continuing developments in the practice of public policy education. Finally, in the margins throughout the report, we offer a sampling of humorous and insightful quotations from our interviews.

THE PROJECTS

The projects that formed the basis of our comparative evaluation are described below. Each description includes a summary of the issues addressed by the project, the *policy arena* in which the issues would be decided, the *audience* for the project, and the membership of the project's *coalition*.

- The ***Global Food Web Project*** in Georgia developed a curriculum on human nutrition, world food supply, and the environment, emphasizing creative learning activities. During each of the next two years volunteer instructors were trained, and a week-long statewide conference was held for county teams of four teens and one adult leader. Following the conference, each team was expected to teach some of what they had learned to 150 other individuals.

  Issue: the "global food web"—human nutrition, world food supply, and the environment

  Policy arena: international but with an expectation of local action

  Audience: teens from throughout the state

  Coalition: extension and a management council made up of extension specialists and agents, representatives of other (nonextension) units at the University of Georgia (e.g., Bureau of Educational Services, Torrence Center for Creative Studies, Institute of Ecology, Institute for Community and Area Development, Botanical Gardens, and International Development), and representatives of other organizations (e.g., State Department of Natural Resources, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Zoo Atlanta, Regional Education Service Agency, and State Department of Education)

- The ***Iowa Public Policy Education Project (PPEP)*** used preference surveys of state legislators, interest groups, and extension councils and a statewide "agenda conference" to identify priority issues and then conducted statewide "satellite town meetings" on each issue, covering two issues per year. A videotaped documentary was developed for each issue in which multiple speakers laid out the issues, options, and local examples. Each satellite town meeting included the documentary, a live statewide panel, local panels at each downlink site, local discussion, and completion of preference surveys. (In the last year of the project, the documentaries were broadcast on commercial television.) In addition, statewide "focus groups" of emerging leaders explored each issue in greater depth with a six-session program of speakers and field trips. Mini-grants to support focus groups at the local level were added during the last year of the project.

  Issue: the farm bill, drug abuse, waste management, health care, education, and the state budget crisis

  Policy arena: state (except for the farm bill), with increasing attention given to local implications as the project evolved

  Audience: citizens of the state (for the satellite town meetings); "emerging leaders" from across the state (for the focus groups)

  Coalition: extension and an eighteen-member council, partly appointed by the university president and partly elected at the "agenda conference," plus representatives of the state legislature and extension field staff

- ***Agriculture and Food Policy in an Interdependent World,*** an Illinois project, featured roundtable discussions of issues related to the farm bill. Discussions were held at four locations throughout the state and involved farmers, environmentalists, and others with conflicting positions on the issues. The project also provided background materials before the roundtables and follow-up newsletters on farm bill developments. A year later, a follow-up conference was held with panels, ample time for questions and answers, and discussion groups on one

We're going to retool extension for the next generation and drag us aggies into the twenty-first century.

—project leader

of the topics. Finally, the project director helped write a "city person's guide to farm policy."

Issue: the farm bill—specifically, international trade, commodity programs, environment, food programs, and food safety

Policy arena: national

Audience: farm and nonfarm citizens throughout the state

Coalition: extension and the state League of Women Voters, with additional support from the Land of Lincoln Soybean Association

- ***Restructuring the Upper Midwest,*** a project carried out in Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Montana, used brainstorming sessions or surveys, variously implemented in each state, to identify issues. Conferences were then sponsored at different locations, convenient for one or two states, with speakers and panels to clarify issues and outline possible solutions. As time went by, the project made increasing use, within the conferences, of discussion groups asked to identify policy recommendations.

  Issue: general—the need for "restructuring" in a region undergoing population decline; specific—rural health care, rural education, rural economic development, and United States–Canada trade

  Policy arena: state, primarily, but with secondary attention given to local and multistate arenas

  Audience: legislators, agency administrators, professionals, and other state and local leaders

  Coalition: extension in Minnesota, South Dakota, and North Dakota; the Montana State University Local Government Center; and the Pickrel Seminars at the University of Minnesota

- The ***Northeast Network Project*** developed educational materials about the food system in the Northeast, consisting of five modules—an overview, one module each on food safety, food costs, and nutrition, and one on the international environment. The materials included background papers for each module, a summary and an overview of each paper, videos to accompany the modules, and a facilitator's guide and accompanying video. Development of materials was followed by in-service education for extension staff in the thirteen northeastern states and support for local pilot projects. A desired outcome was the creation of local councils or networks of diverse food system representatives.

  Issue: the food system in the northeastern United States—specifically, food safety, food costs, and nutrition

  Policy arena: local, state, national, and international

  Audience: individuals who play a role in a community's food system, such as suppliers, producers, processors, distributors, wholesalers, retailers, and consumers

  Coalition: extension in New York and Pennsylvania, with intended participation from extension in eleven other northeastern states

- ***Partners in Natural Resource Policy,*** an Arizona project, focused on a single county and used a participatory approach in which staff conducted informal interviews to identify key players and concerns, conducted a telephone survey in English and Spanish to determine grass-roots concerns over issues, and developed events (a "riverwalk" and a conference) to address those concerns.

  Issue: water quality and supply

  Policy arena: local or, perhaps more accurately, regional (stressing connections among Nogales, Arizona; Nogales, Mexico; and Tucson)

  Audience: local citizens affected by water issues

  Coalition: extension alone, working toward a grass-roots coalition of local citizens and agency representatives as well as a state-level coalition for public policy education

Our goal was not to influence the political process, but to open it up.

—project leader

The [state] legislature meets for ninety days every two years. Some people believe it should meet for two days every ninety years.

—coalition member

- The ***Groundwater Public Policy Education Project (GPEP)*** developed educational materials and then implemented seven state-level pilot projects. The educational materials included a special issue of the *Journal of Soil and Water Conservation*, seventeen leaflets on groundwater and public policy, and a handbook for pilot project leaders (the latter was not completed). Each pilot project was different and had its own coalition, audiences, objectives, and strategies. Pilot project activities included statewide conferences, regional workshops for citizens and local leaders, development and presentation of county "water schools," support for local efforts to educate and develop groundwater policy, and efforts to infuse public policy education into current educational programming.

  Issue: groundwater quality

  Policy arena: state and local

  Audience: primarily state and local elected officials and agency personnel, but some pilot projects also targeted citizens, water-related interest groups, researchers, and others

  Coalition: extension in California, Florida, Iowa, North Carolina, New York, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin; the Freshwater Foundation; and the Soil and Water Conservation Society

- ***Policy Options and Strategies for Total Community Adjustment,*** a Texas project, sponsored a statewide rural development workshop to identify problems and options and engaged in follow-up work designed to create a more broadly based rural development coalition of legislators, agencies, and interest groups. At the local level, in two four-county regions, the project encouraged community leaders to cooperate across community lines to identify problems and rural development strategies.

  Issue: rural development, broadly defined

  Policy arena: state and local (multicommunity)

  Audience: state agencies and interest groups and local community leaders

  Coalition: extension alone, with the objective of developing a coalition of state agencies and interest groups and coalitions of community leaders from neighboring communities (an initial coalition with the Texas Bankers Association ended when the latter withdrew because of budgetary problems)

- ***Communicating America's Farm Policy*** produced press releases based on articles in *Choices*, a policy-oriented magazine published by the American Agricultural Economics Association, and sponsored press conferences with authors of the articles. The project also sponsored informational "backgrounders" for members of the rural and urban press and experimented with other strategies for increasing the readership of *Choices*, including radio spots and a speakers' bureau.

  Issue: food, farm, and resource concerns

  Policy arena: varied with issue, but mostly national or international

  Audience: members of the rural and urban press and, ultimately, consumers

  Coalition: two professional associations, the American Agricultural Economics Association and the American Agricultural Editors Association

- The ***Trade and Development Program (TDP)*** developed educational materials on trade and development issues that comprised a kit for individual and group study; additional information was provided throughout the project. Various dissemination strategies were tried, including working through participating organizations in the project's coalition and holding locally based conferences on these issues. The project also sponsored an educational trip to Central America to study trade issues.

  Issue: linkages among U.S. trade policies, Third World development, and U.S. agriculture

  Policy arena: international, although the project attempted to find local connections

We have made a concerted effort to give the project away.
—project leader, on the importance of local people having ownership of the project

Football seems to be the root of all the problems.
—project staff, noting the difficulty of promoting cooperation across local community boundaries

Audience: members of the participating organizations, expanded toward the end of the project to other grassroots groups and individuals

Coalition: nine national "farm and faith" groups—Bread for the World Institute on Hunger and Development, Center for Rural Affairs, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Friends Committee on National Legislation Education Fund, National Catholic Rural Life Center, National Farmers Organization, National Farmers Union, Presbyterian Church (USA), and U.S. Catholic Conference—forming an "oversight committee" composed of a representative from each organization (a tenth group, the National Grange, left the coalition after the project was under way)

- The ***Food Forum Education Project*** developed educational events and materials on three issues, one per year for the duration of the project. Each year, the two collaborating organizations cosponsored a "food forum" roundtable discussion involving national leaders on different sides of food policy issues and then worked separately to hold leadership training workshops for their members and prepare publications for use in citizen education. In the third year, the forum and the two leadership training events were merged. In addition, six "pass-through" grants were awarded each year for model citizen education projects at the local level.

  Issue: pesticides, the farm bill, and sustainable agriculture

  Policy arena: mainly national, but becoming increasingly local during the course of the project

  Audience: players in national food policy issues and local citizens

  Coalition: National League of Women Voters Education Fund and Public Voice for Food and Health Policy (a consumer food and agriculture research, advocacy, and education organization)

The experiences of these diverse projects suggested the following initial lessons:

LESSON 1

It is possible to implement successful public policy education programs involving a diversity of issues, policy arenas, audiences, and project designs.

A wide variety of issues was addressed by the cluster of eleven projects, including the 1990 farm bill, commodity programs, international trade, environmental protection, waste management, groundwater, nutrition, food safety, food supply, health care, education, economic development, and substance abuse. The policy arenas in which the issues were decided ranged from local to international. In the majority of cases, the issues to be addressed were selected by project leaders; in others, they were chosen by panels of experts, local leaders, or citizens, or by a democratic process. The choice of issues was frequently influenced by the audiences the projects hoped to reach. There were notable differences in the degree to which coalitions or their dominant organizations selected issues outside their normal or traditional areas of expertise.

Target audiences for the projects were nearly as varied as the issues, ranging from relatively small groups of state-level policy leaders to the general public; from relatively homogeneous groups, such as youth or the press, to heterogeneous ones varying in substantive expertise and perspectives on the issue; and from individuals relatively close to the policy process, such as national, state, or local legislators and agency personnel, interest group leaders, the press, and technical experts, to ones farther from the process, such as individual citizens, citizen groups, and youth. Many projects had multiple target audiences. They also varied in the degree to which they actively courted audiences with divergent or competing perspectives on the issues.

Project designs were similarly diverse. Three projects had events-oriented project designs emphasizing audience participation in a conference, roundtable discussion, or other carefully planned event. Two projects had materials-oriented designs emphasizing the development and subsequent dissemination of educational materials to identified audiences. Three projects had two-phase designs involving an extensive process of materials development followed by

[Some groups were not included in the coalition, but those groups] couldn't have agreed that the sun had risen today.
—coalition member

One of the greatest sources of inertia is seeing [a public] issue but feeling alone and having no information about it.
—project leader

use of the materials in a planned set of educational activities. Other designs included a media-oriented project and two projects with emergent, locally based designs.

Project events included seminars, conferences, training workshops, roundtable discussions, and local meetings to view satellite or television programs and engage in discussion. Materials included booklets, educational kits or modules, curricula, video documentaries, a special issue of a journal, background papers, newsletters, conference proceedings, and contributions to a book. Other components of project design included surveys to identify issues or communicate opinion to policymakers, an educational tour, technical assistance, pilot projects, mini-grants to encourage local applications, study groups for deeper investigation of issues by smaller groups of individuals, broadcast of programs by satellite or commercial television, and requirements or expectations that learners teach some of what they learned to others.

We found encouraging the evidence of ability to address a wide variety of issues. The necessity that public policy education be timely and relevant with respect to the ongoing political process meant that educators, to be effective, often had to accept other people's issues or definitions of the issues. The ability to address a wide variety of audiences was also important. The audiences that needed the most help were likely to differ with different issues, and different audiences were likely to need different kinds of help. Clear delineation of and familiarity with target audiences were essential for effective public policy education. Moreover, multiple audiences—or at least the ability to reflect multiple viewpoints on an issue—were also highly desirable. Otherwise, educators risked "preaching to the choir" and perpetuating the difficulty of moving from self-interest to public decision.

Finally, the ability to draw on a "toolbox" of project designs was also valuable, given the likelihood that different audiences and different issues needed to be addressed in different ways if educational programs were to succeed. Although we were not always convinced that choice of project designs was well thought out, the diversity of designs and design elements actually used provided a useful array of examples for future projects to borrow, adapt, or build upon.

Vignette: Developing Public Policy Education Programs on Unfamiliar Issues

The Iowa Public Policy Education Project (PPEP) selected issues using an essentially democratic process and consequently faced the frequent challenge of addressing issues on which project staff, and extension as a whole, had little experience or expertise.

For its initial selection of issues, the project surveyed state legislators, statewide interest groups, and extension councils, asking respondents to rank a list of thirty-one issues by priority. A broad statewide cross-section of legislators, lobbyists, and community leaders was then invited to an "Iowa Agenda Conference" at which the survey results were reviewed to develop an agenda for the project. Nearly 450 individuals participated in the conference. The final selection of issues was made by the project's coalition, the PPEP Council, an eighteen-member policy-making body. The council consisted of seven members appointed by the Iowa State University president, seven elected by participants in the agenda conference, and two each representing the state legislature and extension field staff.

The council decided that the project should cover the farm bill for its first program—a familiar issue to get their feet wet—and drug abuse for the second program. Mounting a credible and successful program on drug abuse was considered a big but welcome challenge. Topics for the second year were waste management and health care, and for the third year education and the state's budget crisis.

For each topic, the project held a statewide satellite meeting in which 2,000 to 3,000 participants viewed a

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program and engaged in local discussions at downlink sites throughout the state. In the project's third year, the programs were broadcast on commercial television.

Project staff developed for each topic a videotaped documentary and a live statewide panel for the satellite town meetings. Because of the staff's lack of expertise in most of the topics, a campus/field staff task force—different for each topic—was created to draft an initial program outline and identify potential interviewees for the documentary and relevant interest groups to be invited to an information luncheon. A book of registered lobbyists and interest groups was maintained to help identify persons to invite to the luncheons. By the end of the project, the participants in these luncheons were considered "issue-oriented planning coalitions." They provided program content input, identified additional interviewees for the documentary, nominated focus group members, and helped promote the program.

Whenever someone suggested that project staff were not knowledgeable enough to be involved in a particular issue, staff would say, "You're right! That's why we need your help!"

Expertise for the documentaries was provided by the persons interviewed. To prepare for the interviews, staff spent more than two weeks gathering background information, emphasizing "researching the person" instead of trying to become substantive experts. The satellite town meeting programs were then rounded out by creating a politically balanced live panel. Local downlink hosts were responsible for the local panels and discussions.

LESSON 2

One element missing from many of the projects' interventions was "intensity." Successful public policy education programs require educational interventions that are sufficiently intense or powerful to accomplish the intended aims for the target audience and issue.

Most project designs resembled more a collection of events and materials and less a reasoned sequence of engagements for the same audiences, cohesively directed toward specified aims. Few projects undertook interventions with much intensity, even when audiences included ordinary citizens, issues were acknowledged to be complex and multifaceted, or project objectives included increased participation in the policy process. Yet it seemed clear that less engaged audiences, more complex issues, and more ambitious objectives would require more intense interventions.

For example, a one-day conference might have been sufficient to impart information to a single audience already knowledgeable about a public policy issue or about the policy-making process. But the same intervention might not impart sufficient information or promote dialogue among multiple audiences. And a one-day conference was unlikely to catalyze policy action among previously uninvolved citizens.

Staff and coalition members in several projects acknowledged the limited contact most participants had with the projects or realized that some audiences were disappointed that the projects did not go beyond the provision of information or an opportunity to talk. In some cases, efforts were made, beyond the originally planned events, to permit or encourage additional discussion or local follow-up activity. Often, however, even when such needs were recognized, it was not possible to meet them with available resources.

In our view, public policy education programs have the potential to help reverse the trends toward increasing disengagement from the policy arena in our society. These trends are powerful, so that effective challenges to them must be even more powerful. That calls for multiple versus single engagements, ongoing or sustained versus one-shot experiences, and educational philosophies that require active versus passive learning.

There must be a phase in public policy education where people walk away with fewer answers than they walked in with.

—coalition member

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COALITIONS

The W. K. Kellogg Foundation's public policy education project cluster was funded with the requirement that all projects be conducted by two or more organizations working collaboratively. This requirement addressed the inherent contentiousness of public policy debates in a democratic society. If two or more organizations that had different perspectives on a given public policy issue joined in creating and implementing an educational program, meaningful progress on this issue in the public arena would be more likely. What did the cluster evaluation team learn about the nature and role of coalitions in public policy education?

LESSON 3

The likelihood of success in public policy education programs is enhanced when programs are planned and implemented by a coalition of organizations.

When we inquired about the benefits and drawbacks of working in coalitions, many of the benefits cited related to specific individuals or organizations (see Lesson 7). Others, however, related to an improved capacity to carry out effective public policy education programs. Examples included conducting a project that a single organization could not do alone, producing better educational materials as a result of interaction, access to more diverse audiences, and increased credibility for the project as a result of multiple sponsorship. In one project, Cooperative Extension and the League of Women Voters collaborated; the league gave extension access to environmentalists and other "urban" audiences, whereas extension helped give the league entry into and credibility in the agriculture community. Almost everyone we interviewed acknowledged that their project could not have been done without the other members of the coalition or that it would have been a very different project had one organization done it alone.

Each of the following results, effects, or consequences, clearly attributable to the existence of coalitions, was documented in at least one project:

- reaching an expanded and more diverse audience
- experimenting with a new educational format such as roundtables
- working across disciplinary lines in creating materials
- developing more balanced materials with respect to the policy alternatives presented
- incorporating both content and process concerns in materials and events
- bringing key players together in discussions of policy issues (such as groundwater), the resolution of which required the involvement of multiple players (e.g., local and state government officials)
- enhancing the credibility of the project via multiple, joint sponsorship
- enabling greater risk taking in the project (because risks are shared among all coalition members)
- catalyzing action rather than just facilitating intellectual discussion

In our view, several components of effective public policy education can be best fulfilled when two or more organizations collaborate. These components include (1) reflecting multiple perspectives on the issues at hand, (2) ensuring balance or fairness in the treatment of each perspective, (3) offering process assistance as well as information, (4) reaching multiple audiences, and (5) addressing issues that others have a share in selecting or defining. Although a single organization could execute these steps, it would probably not be done very effectively. Additional organizations can more easily reflect diverse perspectives; ensure fairness through their ability to understand and speak for different elements of the political universe; provide needed expertise on content or process; contribute knowledge of, access to, or acceptability with different audiences; and offer the expertise necessary to address different issues or definitions of an issue.

Our coalition represents many diverse interests. We had to have a peace treaty just to get started.

—coalition member

LESSON 4

There are many legitimate ways to form a coalition.

The coalitions for the eleven projects differed in size, scope, type of members, and structure. Size varied from two single-organization projects that used grass-roots strategies to try to develop community-based coalitions; to three projects with nine to ten organizational members; and one with eighteen individuals as coalition members. Five projects had coalitions with members from a single state; three had multistate coalitions; and three had coalitions most of whose members were national organizations based in Washington, D.C. Six coalitions had both extension and nonextension organizational members; three contained only nonextension members; and two were made up of only extension members. The nonextension members included educational, advocacy, academic, and professional organizations; government agencies; nonextension university units; and individual leaders and citizens.

Individual coalition members varied in the degree to which they represented themselves or their home organizations and, when they did represent an organization, in the degree to which the organization as well as the individual was committed to the project. In the majority of projects, at least some of the organizational or individual coalition members had worked together previously. Most projects underwent changes in membership, often by individual representatives of organizations in the coalition, but sometimes by the organizations themselves.

Structure

Two projects were characterized as *developing* coalitions. Each was comprised of a single organization working toward the formation of a coalition. Six projects had *asymmetrical* coalitions, consisting of one or more dominant organizations (often extension) providing leadership and staff for the project and other organizations in supporting roles. Three of these projects had a single dominant organization; the others had two or three dominant organizations with additional organizations in secondary, supporting roles. Three projects had *symmetrical* coalitions in which all members collaborated more or less equally. Two of these had two-organization coalitions in which each member provided staff for the project; the other had a ten-member coalition with a separate staff accountable to the entire coalition.[1]

Definition

The working definition and significance of the coalition concept also varied across projects. In a few cases, the supporting members of a coalition played a role that did not differ greatly from that of a simple advisory committee. In many projects, the coalition functioned primarily to enhance and pool resources between essentially similar organizations or ones that had worked together in the past. In other projects, the coalition developed and adopted a new agenda that reflected at least some interests of all coalition members. The latter coalitions were more likely to involve partners with little or no previous history of working together. One project developed its agenda beginning with the "arduous hammering out, word by word" of a common statement of principles with which all coalition members could agree. These principles served to guide and frame project direction and, in turn, all project materials and activities.

Coalitions should help a project to address a full range of perspectives on an issue and to tap the necessary diversity of information sources. Such a mission can be fulfilled with a variety of coalition designs. Nevertheless, the next four lessons offer guidance on the types of coalitions that were more likely to serve this function.

LESSON 5

Strong coalitions have organizational partners distinguished by several key characteristics.

The coalitions varied in terms of a multidimensional quality that we called *coalition strength*. We assumed that a strong coalition was one that would broaden and further the policy debate on an issue. Given this definition, four

> The coalition has been fantastic for extension. . . . We haven't always cooperated within the university system, let alone with external agencies.
>
> **—extension administrator**

[1] Asymmetrical coalitions were more likely than the more egalitarian ones to (a) have both extension and nonextension members, (b) have projects with a single-state focus, (c) to experience at least somewhat troublesome conflicts or changes in coalition membership, and (d) make additional use of the coalition concept beyond their "official" coalition—including additional advisory groups with diverse membership, ad hoc groups with diverse membership to plan specific events, or the involvement of project participants in coalition-like study groups.

projects had strong coalitions; two had medium-strong coalitions; three were "not really coalitions" (primarily because only one organization had decision-making authority for the project); and two projects attempted to develop coalitions as an intentional part of their design. What follows are the multiple dimensions of coalition strength.

- **Organizational partners in strong coalitions had discernibly different but not irreconcilable perspectives on the issues, from which they forged a common project agenda or purpose.** Among the eleven projects, the reasons for developing a particular coalition, beyond satisfying a condition of funding, were generally not clear. Coalition formation did not appear to be based on a carefully thought-out rationale, but the creation of a common agenda appeared critical to making a group a coalition.

  It was not difficult to develop a common purpose when the participating organizations had similar perspectives. The more serious challenge lay in finding common ground between organizations that had differing but not irredeemably conflicting perspectives. That is, a strong coalition was not just a group with a common agenda but a diverse group with a common agenda—but not too diverse lest the group become immobilized by its differences. Among the eleven projects, two faced and met this challenge. One project with a ten-member coalition hammered out a common statement of principles (e.g., "small- and medium-sized U.S. farms are important and should be protected") with which all members agreed and around which the subsequent educational program was developed. The other project was a coalition between Cooperative Extension, with its acknowledged rural and agricultural bias, and the League of Women Voters, an organization with a predominantly urban and suburban membership considered strongly environmentalist on agriculture-environment issues.

  At least two other projects held difficult and sometimes painful discussions in search of common ground. But in these cases the principal differences were among factions within a single organization—namely, extension. As such, these discussions were constrained at the outset by the boundaries of Cooperative Extension. Although such discussions may have facilitated changes within extension, we considered organizational change a side benefit, not a primary objective, of coalition-based public policy education (see Lesson 7).

- **Organizational members in strong coalitions brought complementary expertise or resources to the project.** Organizational partners in nearly all of the strong coalitions brought complementary, project-related expertise or resources to their joint endeavors. Examples in two-member coalitions included process expertise and content expertise, national connections and local citizen networks, and access to the press and to substantive experts. That complementarity appeared to underlie a tendency in the projects for the different coalition partners to take on different project responsibilities—that is, for the partners to work on parallel tracks rather than on merged or more interactive tracts. But all kinds of tracks appeared capable of leading to successful educational programs; one route was not necessarily superior to the others.

- **Organizational members in strong coalitions had equal or almost equal project decision-making responsibility and authority.** Partners in all the strong coalitions shared decision-making responsibility and authority equally or almost equally. No other projects had comparable symmetry in coalition structure.

  Parity in organizational structure and decision making was important in public policy education coalitions because it ensured that the common agenda reflected equitably the perspectives represented. Second, it enabled the coalition to model the democratic values of equity, respect, and caring likely to be promoted in its educational program.

  Yet the experiences of a medium-strong coalition raised an important challenge to this argument. Power imbalances characterized organizational relationships within that asymmetrical coalition. Yet no one appeared troubled by such imbalances nor did the imbalances appear to impede project activities, which tended to be

I'm convinced the more weird the team is, the more management problems you have and the better the project is.
—project leader

planned and conducted for each organizational member separately. One coalition member wondered if the obviousness of these inequalities allowed the partners to minimize professional rivalries.

- **Organizational members in strong coalitions demonstrated organizational support for or commitment to the coalitions' projects.** The importance of this criterion of organizational support was more obvious when it was absent. In other words, having strong organizational commitment did not typically contribute anything concrete or tangible to the project, but the absence of such commitment often seriously derailed or blocked intended project activities or directions.

  For example, in one otherwise strong coalition, lack of organizational commitment to the project among some coalition partners engendered serious challenges to, and subsequent redirections of, the project's dissemination plans. In another otherwise strong coalition, lack of organizational support was painfully manifested by limited project awareness among many organization members and, hence, their limited attendance at project events. And, in a coalition comprised of elements within a single organization ("not really a coalition"), project staff expended enormous energy and time battling for a toehold within the larger organization. In this case, even a modicum of organizational support, or simply the absence of active resistance, would have freed staff energies considerably to pursue the project objectives.

- **Organizational members in strong coalitions had individual coalition representatives with commitment to the project.** In addition to the organizational commitment, the individual representatives to the project coalition also needed to be committed to the project. Such individual commitment was a characteristic of nearly all coalitions in this cluster.

LESSON 6

Strong coalitions are not automatically formed when two or more organizations come together, even when such organizations meet the criteria specified in the previous lesson. Rather, strong coalitions have to be created and carefully nurtured through processes that are often laborious, painful, and full of compromise.

Most of the strong, successful coalitions were characterized by good working relationships among their members. Several projects had to rebuild relationships when changes occurred in coalition membership. Two projects successfully resolved early conflicts among coalition members.

Vignette: Exemplary Organizational Support

The director of extension at this land-grant university strongly supported the public policy education project on water issues that was recently initiated by one of his faculty members. He noted that water issues were not only a national extension priority but currently a state priority for extension programming and research as well. It seemed almost as if this extension director perceived the water project as a feather in his own cap. Such strong support—while perhaps not translatable into concrete resources or assistance—surely could not harm the progress and potential influence of the water project.

Some of us love prairie land, and some of us plow it up.
—participant in a roundtable discussion involving farm and nonfarm interests

An environmentalist is a farmer whose well went bad.
—speaker at a workshop sponsored by one of the projects

I could not have done the project if I were not a full professor who couldn't care less [about departmental support, for example].
—project leader

[A strong coalition like this] doesn't just happen—particularly in Washington.
—project leader

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Coalitions are ultimately comprised of individual people representing their organizations. "People are the key," said one coalition member. In strong coalitions, the interrelationships among these individuals were characterized by trust, mutual respect, and rapport. And these positive interrelationships were carefully wrought and sustained by coalition leaders or staff skilled in group process and relationship-building. Members in two strong coalitions had worked together previously and so brought trust and rapport to the present project. In the other two projects with strong coalitions, coalition members were initially strangers and developed their positive working relationships during the project. In all four strong coalitions, members shared project authority and responsibility equally, were supported in their project activities by their home organizations, and, perhaps most importantly, allocated time and energy to coalition-building activities.

The experiences of one of the medium-strong coalitions perhaps most dramatically underscored the importance of strong personal relationships. In this three-member coalition, organizational commitment was strong, but there was considerable turnover in organizational representatives to the coalition, especially at the outset of the project. In the words of the project director, "The 'glue that makes them [coalitions] stick' together is in large part the rapport and trust which accumulates as people representing the organizations get to know one another and develop working relationships. Organizational change presents a challenge to the viability of coalitions. When individuals representing participating organizations leave, coalition relationships become less stable and the project loses momentum. Members must make new investments to restore the coalition and bring a project back to its former productivity level" (Abdalla 1990, pp. 127–28).

In short, coalitions needed to be nurtured. Too much attention to process could divert energies from substance or task, but cooperation would not necessarily be automatic when two or more organizations were brought together. Careful attention to "up-front" work at the beginning of a collaboration was required in most cases for a strong coalition and a successful project.

Vignette: A Staff Member's Vision Expands

Three years ago, Arthur was a state-level extension specialist in natural resources. He spent half his time at the land grant university and the other half traveling around the state offering guidance to county extension staff. His work focused on the technical and educational dimensions of natural resource issues, and he interacted largely with other educators.

Then, Arthur became the key staff member for his state in a public policy education project related to natural resources. His work on this project engaged him directly in the policy arena—both in national legislation and, more dramatically, in local politics and decision making. Arthur interacted not only with educators but with policymakers and directly with concerned citizens. His work now addressed not just the technical and educational dimensions of natural resource issues, but their social, policy, and action dimensions as well.

In the process, Arthur became a leader and a professional with a new direction for his career. No longer would the cloistered halls of the academy be sufficiently engaging and rewarding for Arthur. With his newly honed skills and experience, Arthur can be found out among the local folks, working on natural resource policies at the level where they directly hurt or soothe—still an educator, but no longer from a distance.

At the end of this project, I will feel that I have a community.
—coalition member

In comedy, coalition, and sex, context and timing are critically important.
—coalition member

This project could never have happened in-house. It wouldn't have had a snowball's chance in hell.
—extension specialist who worked with one of the projects

Coalitions should be bound by a purpose and not by a structure. . . . With formalization, groups fall apart.
—coalition member

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LESSON 7

Coalitions typically benefit individuals and organizational members. But individual leadership development or organizational change should not substitute for meaningful progress in the policy arena.

Among the individual professional development benefits cited by coalition members were exercising leadership, learning to listen and work with diverse participants in public policy settings, and developing new knowledge about or sensitivity to unfamiliar issues, perspectives, or organizations. Examples included: "[I gained] a better understanding of what is involved in trying to educate a group or the public in general and methods to do both"; "I learned about policy issues I didn't know much about"; and "[I developed] an appreciation of diverse points of view."

Coalition participants also cited benefits related to networking, including the opportunity to meet new people, work effectively and creatively with others, and make connections with people who have similar interests.

Coalitions most often benefited organizations by giving them an enhanced image or visibility or by exerting pressure for internal organizational change. The latter was most evident within extension. The presence of other organizations in coalitions with extension, together with the requirements of the grant, helped extension (in some states) take on new issues, address new audiences, develop new perspectives and sensitivity, alter its image, and gain experience in "issues programming." Other organizations were similarly affected, as illustrated by the League of Women Voters' new involvement in agricultural issues.

Enhancing the ability of individuals to provide vision and leadership and stimulating ponderous organizations like extension toward responsive change were valued outcomes of coalition-run public policy education projects. But such outcomes alone are neither sufficient justification for requiring coalitions in public policy education projects nor sufficient evidence of project success. Coalition and project success should be judged instead on the nature and extent of action occurring among program participants in the policy arena. Successful public policy education projects catalyzed such action, independent of their effects on the host organizations or individual project leaders.

LESSON 8

Public policy education can be effective in the absence of a formal coalition, but not in the absence of the spirit or broad intentions of a coalition—specifically, the commitment to meaningfully incorporating diversity by offering policy alternatives that reflect different points of view, and, at root, different values, in the form and function of the program offered.

Members of one medium-strong coalition repeatedly challenged the ongoing attention to coalitions and coalition-building in the cluster. They wondered about the connections between coalitions and effective public policy education and raised the following specific challenges:

- Public policy education inherently deals with diversity, even conflict, whereas coalitions need a common agenda
- An effective coalition is fluid and bound by a common purpose rather than by a formal structure
- Coalitions are an inevitable part of the public policy process, so they do not need or warrant special attention

Members of a stronger coalition believed that the formal coalition structure was much less important than the commitment to seek diversity, be inclusive, and offer distinct perspectives. In fact, the formal structure might well interfere with or detract attention from such a commitment.

Within the cluster were numerous instances of coalition spirit without a formal structure. Several projects, for example, ensured multiple perspectives, even when they were not represented on the coalition, by using ad hoc committees with diverse memberships to plan conferences or other educational events. Another project ensured balance in its educational materials by relying on advisory committees whose members criticized drafts from both traditional and more progressive viewpoints on food and agricultural issues. At least two projects used surveys to identify issues to be addressed, whereas another relied on brainstorming meetings with diverse groups of knowledgeable individuals. These were all "coalition-like" mechanisms but were implemented outside the project's formal coalition.

Are formal coalitions, then, required for effective public policy education programs? Our answer was no. We concluded, however, that the *essence* of coalitions—the commitment to diversity and inclusiveness in perspective and values—was critical for meaningful public policy education programs. Without such commitment, public policy education programs could approach propaganda.

REFLECTIONS ON PUBLIC POLICY EDUCATION

A CASE STUDY

"That was much less painful than I had anticipated," thought Marilyn after the cluster evaluation team's first site visit to her public policy education project. Marilyn was tidying up her office at the League of Women Voters Education Fund, a long-standing, highly respected national organization with an educational public policy mission. "The chance to reflect on our first year of work, together with the key project people from our partner organization, Public Voice for Food and Health Policy, was not only useful; it was almost enjoyable."

"And, especially upon reflection, I think our first year was quite successful. As I told the cluster evaluators yesterday, one of our important successes is the strong working relationship established between the two partners involved in this project—on both personal and organizational levels. Public Voice is really quite something. It's such a small organization, and yet they are constantly in the news. I think that's because their director, Alison Grinswall, is masterful in working with the media. She's like a concert harpist, knowing exactly how to pluck reporters' 'hot-story' strings. In fact, Public Voice exists largely to research and publicize major news stories about our food supply, stories that intentionally disrupt the status quo. And their expertise with the media really complements our own strong nationwide network of community-based citizen groups and our tradition of expertise in education at the community level. So far, this project has needed both."

Specifically, during this project, Public Voice's media expertise was tapped to publicize project events such as the annual food forum. That forum promoted dialogue on selected food and farm issues among high-level policymakers with diverse viewpoints—such as environmentalists and chemical industry representatives. Public Voice's connections with the policy community in Washington, D.C., were important in getting participation in these forums. Press conferences, also organized by Public Voice, were held each year to announce the project's major publications. Annually, Public Voice and the League of Women Voters each produced one publication oriented to its own organizational audiences. As important as anything else, the league gave credibility to this project as an educational endeavor and long-standing expertise in working at the grass-roots level on public issues. The league tapped into its local citizen networks for attendees at the trainings, which followed the food forums each year, and for annual recipients of small, local grants from the project. Both the training and the small grants were designed to promote education and action about project issues at the state and local levels.

Toward the end of cluster evaluators' final site visit to the project, Marilyn reflected again. "The fact that Roger (who was the principal project staff person from Public Voice) and I got along so well, and that his economic background in food and farm issues was a good match to my more substantive focus on natural resources and the environment, are important contributions to this project's successful partnership. But, I think what really counts in the public policy arena is not so much a formal organizational partnership, or coalition as Kellogg calls it—which can take a lot of time and energy to sustain. Rather, what's most critical is the commitment to respecting diversity and the openness to the possibility of compromise. With these, your work may actually meaningfully advance the public policy debate. Without them, you'll just be tooting your own horn, and your message may well be lost amidst the cacophony of individual interests that is the public policy debate in this country today, rivaled only by a New York City street embroiled in a traffic jam at quitting time during a thunderstorm."

A story about one of Public Voice's publications illuminates an important issue in public policy education endeavors—the inherent tension between education and advocacy, a tension at the forefront of this cluster of projects because of Kellogg Foundation's strict prohibitions against using funds for advocacy purposes. Given its tradition and its reputation, the league's publications were decidedly evenhanded and explicitly educational, presenting multiple points of view on the issues. Public Voice, however, was more accustomed to working in an advocacy mode and found itself with the challenge of reorienting its work to be

educational. In particular, Public Voice's first project publication came to the attention of the Kellogg Foundation's project officer by way of several phone calls from irate agribusiness people in the Midwest. "How could the foundation responsibly sponsor this outrageous work!" was these individuals' concern. While certainly not outrageous in most people's eyes, this publication did take a particular stand favoring strict controls over pesticides in farming, a stand not well received by many in the agrichemical community. Roger from Public Voice acknowledged that learning to write something that did not explicitly take a stand took some time, but he—and others, including the Kellogg project officer—believed this was learned by the end of the project.

At the same time, both Roger and Marilyn wondered if a strictly neutral stance on public issues was either possible or desirable. "It's hard to do effective public policy education without having an advocacy perspective that's rooted in close, ongoing linkages to policy issues and processes, and an advocacy base that can provide an outlet for people's activism and passion," suggested both Roger and Marilyn at the end of their project. "A balance-bias tension in effective public policy education is inevitable and part of what makes it effective."

At the end of their project, Roger and Marilyn also reflected on what it means to do public policy education, in particular, who is the most important public to reach? Here, they had cre ed and implemented a successful project that involved various publics in education and conversation about timely food and farm issues such as pesticide use in agriculture. High-level policymakers, representing diverse viewpoints, came together for conversation in the project's food forums. Interested citizen leaders from all over the country, especially representing the league's established member-activists, participated in education and conversation with others about these issues. Like the recipients of the project's community grants, some workshop participants offered educational and dialogue opportunities of their own when they returned to their home towns. And thousands of requests had been received for the project's publications.

Yet, despite these accomplishments, Marilyn and Roger were rethinking the meaning of public policy education as they neared completion of this project. Specifically, they believed that their work had reached the already-informed and involved but had not effectively capacitated local groups. In the wisdom of Tip O'Neill, all policy is ultimately local policy. Thus public policy education at base should be local. In their next project, Marilyn and Roger would place more emphasis on local-level work and on energizing local people connected with leadership training and with opportunities to influence policy. This would enable the local projects to be supported longer and more intensively, thereby redirecting the focus of public policy education endeavors to those whose lives are affected by the issues but who currently do not claim their voice in issue debates or decisions.

IMPLEMENTATION

As the cluster evaluation team observed and inquired about the projects' implementation—challenges, successes, lessons, and adjustments—several themes emerged. One was the relative emphasis of different modes of education—provision of information, dialogue among persons involved in policy-making, and empowerment of people affected by the issues but not yet involved. Other themes included the role and importance of process assistance, relationships with the news media, and the line between education and advocacy.

LESSON 9

Different modes of public policy education are appropriate for different audiences, issues, and contexts. The projects found the dialogue mode to be a valuable alternative or supplement to information provision.

The projects in this cluster could be distinguished by their primary mode of public policy education. We discerned three different modes:

Information provision, the most prevalent mode, was, at least initially, the single dominant mode of education in at least six projects. Forms of information included printed materials, conference presentations, panels, press conferences, and video documentaries. They contained facts about existing conditions and trends, causes of problems, the positions and strategies of different groups, alternative solutions, and case studies of solutions that had worked in other settings. Although information about the policy process could have been included, in actual practice most information focused on the issues.

In providing information, most projects endeavored to represent all viewpoints on an issue. Most also found that it is exceedingly difficult to provide fair and equitable information. One project underwent highly emotional battles between environmentalists and agriculturalists in curriculum development. Staff in another project reported literally counting the seconds of exposure for competing political viewpoints in a video program. In other projects, the development of educational materials took longer than expected, diminishing the role of those materials in project implementation.

This mode of public policy education—and its concomitant reliance on materials—seemed insufficient for all except very elite audiences. High-level policymakers might benefit from a program intended to update their knowledge and understanding of a public issue. Those people already know how the system works and, more importantly, how to get their own voice and those of their constituents heard in the policy process. Most other audiences, however, are likely to need more than information to become meaningfully engaged in the policy process.

Dialogue, a second mode of education, was dominant in no more than four projects, although many of the projects provided at least some opportunity for dialogue. Whereas diverse perspectives on an issue could be clarified through information provision, the dialogue mode put stronger emphasis on creating a forum in which participants from different sides of an issue could inform one another. Examples among the eleven projects included roundtable discussions of issues related to the farm bill, involving environmentalists, farmers, and others, and local discussion groups including representatives of different sectors of the food system.

Several projects paid increasing attention to dialogue. One, which sponsored conferences on important regional issues such as health care, placed greater emphasis on convening diverse discussion groups and asking them to develop policy recommendations. Another, which initially invested considerable time and energy in developing materials, later emphasized the process of bringing diverse interests together and relegated the materials to a supporting role.

Program participants required information about the issues. They also needed to know how other people were affected by the same issues, and required opportunities to develop the mutual understanding and agreement neces-

> This is beautiful stuff, but who asked for it?
>
> **—potential user of materials developed by one of the projects**

> Everything we've tried to do [in this project] has been twice as hard to do as expected.
>
> **—project leader**

sary for genuine issue resolution. Lack of agreement was arguably a bigger obstacle to the resolution of public issues than lack of knowledge. We are not suggesting a choice between information provision and dialogue. For many public policy audiences, both were needed. People involved in making public policy need to understand multiple perspectives, and this was often accomplished most effectively through a balance of information provision and opportunities for dialogue.

LESSON 10

The empowerment mode of public policy education was underused by the projects, suggesting a future need to reach out more concertedly to groups and individuals who are currently affected by but not involved in the policy process.

Empowerment, a third mode of education, was the least prevalent one among the eleven projects, and only three projects placed any significant emphasis on it. Education in this mode may have included information provision or dialogue but was distinguished from the other modes primarily by its target audience, people who were affected by public issues but whose perspectives were poorly represented in the policy-making process. One project (featured in the vignette at right) attempted to mobilize citizens in a county with a large Spanish-speaking population; another was targeted toward youth; and a third had the explicit objective of reaching large numbers of citizens (rather than providing in-depth information to a smaller number).

These rather limited experiences did not give us much basis for learning about education in the empowerment mode. But, consistent with the literature on empowerment, the projects with empowerment objectives were at least somewhat more likely than the others to (1) allow issues to emerge from the intended audience, (2) provide information about the policy process as well as the issues, and (3) include some form of special encouragement or assistance in taking action, especially at the individual level. Yet, most conceptualizations of empowerment maintain that some group, collective, or structural level of action or change is

I have not felt that it empowered people. I think people feel empowered when they see something happen.
—participant, commenting on one of the projects

They talk about one another rather than *to* one another.
—participant, describing the usual interaction between farm and nonfarm groups

Vignette: Endeavoring to Empower Local Residents

About twenty-five people had gathered in the spacious meeting room of the new county office building up on the hill. It was a pleasant January evening in this southwestern town, with a hint of dampness in the air despite the continuing drought. In fact, it was water issues that had brought these people to the meeting. Representing a host of varied constituencies—ranchers, city government, state parks, high school youth, sanitation agencies, and private citizens—these people had voluntarily gathered in this public forum to discuss their differing views on water issues. Like many areas in the Southwest, water issues in this town related to both the quantity and quality of water resources. In the local wisdom, "Around here, whiskey's for drinking and water's for fighting."

The educators who had convened this meeting hoped that, via an open airing and discussion of contrasting views, ideas and priorities for a planned education program could be established. The selection of water issues as a top priority already represented diverse citizen input because it reflected the results of a bilingual survey conducted in the area the previous fall. Now the task was to develop an educational program that would be responsive to citizens' needs and interests and that would engage people affected by water policy decisions but currently without a voice in these decisions.

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also needed. Moreover, most of these projects lacked an effort to involve their audiences in a sustained set of activities over time. In other words, the intensity of intervention in these projects was not significantly different from the other projects. (In no project was the educational experience intense by design.) Yet much work on empowerment argues that it requires a sustained commitment over time.

Working with groups already involved in the policy process is a legitimate focus for public policy education, especially when the goal is to increase reciprocal understanding among diverse groups. But such work might serve only to maintain the status quo with respect to who participates and has a voice if it is not accompanied by equivalent efforts to facilitate the participation of individuals and groups who are affected by issues but not yet involved. Finding ways to challenge present patterns of unequal representation and participation in policy-making should be an important goal of public policy education.

LESSON 11

Attention to process as well as content was a critical feature of the projects. Multiple types of process assistance are needed in public policy education endeavors so as to address the different process needs of the various audiences involved.

One important form of process assistance in public policy education projects, addressed in Lesson 6, is facilitation of the internal processes vital to the internal functioning of the project coalitions themselves. Strong coalitions needed to nurture their interpersonal and inter-institutional interactions and relationships.

Relevant to the audiences of public policy education ventures, at least three other types of process assistance could shape such endeavors: first, paralleling process assistance for coalition members, there is training or leadership in the kind of group dynamics necessary to facilitate an effective policy dialogue. Such training or leadership would help project audiences to listen, understand, respect, and work with those holding other viewpoints on public policy issues. In addition, there is also the need to establish the conditions for such learning and practice to take place; process assistance would provide the opportunities or forums for such dialogue. It can be argued that this form of assistance should undergird any other assistance provided in the policy education process.

Many of the projects evidenced this form of process assistance. Their interventions ranged from providing explicit assistance in the form of in-service training workshops for project audiences, to providing implicit assistance in the selection of a skilled group facilitator as project director, to simply providing the forums in which effective dialogue could happen. For example, one project provided process training for the leaders of their roundtable discussion groups, and another provided in-service training to extension staff as project implementors and audience trainers. Both of these projects included a printed leadership guide to accompany and extend the training. At the same time, however, several projects appeared to assume that process simply "happens" and requires no special efforts. In those cases, opportunities for group discussion sometimes went unfulfilled because of the absence of a specific process intervention.

A second form of process assistance—rarely evidenced in the projects in this cluster—provides direct assistance to project audiences in understanding how the public policy process itself works and identifying opportunities for them to become effectively involved in the process at different levels of engagement. This assistance might vary greatly depending on the project audience.

A third type of process assistance that several projects worked toward but did not often address directly, facilitates the translation of learning into action—providing assistance in knowing how to take effective action in support of a given position on a policy issue and providing leadership training for those intent on effecting change in the policy process.

The nature and intensity of process assistance needed probably depends on the audiences addressed during the project, with relatively more emphasis on content for audiences already knowledgeable or experienced in the policy process and a more intensive process assistance strategy when a project attempts to reach a broader, more general audience.

I'm skeptical of process stuff, but I'm learning. I spent twenty-five years in the military where they don't teach a lot of process.

—coalition member

Affirming the importance of process assistance in public policy education, several projects paid increasing attention to dialogue as time went by. As many as eight projects moved toward a greater emphasis on providing opportunities for discussion or facilitating local activities among their audiences. Two projects created local funding opportunities during their final phases so as to bring local groups together to discuss the issues and take action.

In our view, this topic deserves greater attention in future projects. If effective public policy education demands moving beyond information provision to more active engagement in the policy process, then the projects themselves should provide conditions for such engagement. Dialogue, respect for differences, consensus building, and search for common ground in forging viable public policy recommendations are important elements that should be built into public policy education projects. Simply assuming that process will "happen" often leads to disappointing results or project impacts that fall short of what is possible.

LESSON 12

The news media are a potentially strategic resource for public policy education, but were underused by the projects. More attention needs to be given to the nature of the media's role and responsibility in public policy education.

Only one project was specifically media-oriented in design. Two other projects, however, developed strong links to the media. One capitalized on a coalition partner's extensive experience and networks with the media; the other developed a working relationship with a network of commercial television stations. Many of the other projects reported adequate media coverage of their events or publications. But these projects seemed to view coverage primarily as publicity rather than a way of extending a project's educational message to a larger audience.

The projects' composite experience with the media offered an opportunity to explore the potential roles and responsibilities of the media in greater depth. Projects engaged media personnel in several ways. Journalists were invited to attend press conferences, to observe public policy education events, and even to participate in educational events.

The three projects based in Washington, D.C., held press conferences to announce publications. Although some of those conferences sought to reach a broader audience than media personnel, one major audience consisted of national and regional journalists who might convey information about the publications and issues to their constituencies. Whereas press conferences offered the opportunity for information and dialogue with the publications' authors, the information eventually reported to the public could provide only basic exposure to the issues presented. This was especially true because the media personnel who participated in press conferences were based in Washington, D.C., and it was difficult to personalize public policy issues for a grass-roots base when they were presented at such an abstract, national level.

We suggest that more thought be given to the relationship between the level of media (national, regional, local) and the stage of development of a public policy issue (exposure, dialogue, action). Moving beyond simple exposure to issues might be most effectively handled at state and local levels where public policy issues can be made more concrete by examining specific manifestations of a problem or concern.

Some of the projects with local public policy education events attempted to invite the media to observe and report on those events. Because most of the events to which the media were invited were discussion-oriented, this approach enabled media personnel to report on policy issues at the grass-roots level by identifying and representing the views of local actors on local policy issues. One project reported successful involvement of the media in two locally focused pilot projects, one of which included "news reports of the issues from a broader perspective" among its reported outcomes. Yet this approach was not enthusiastically embraced by all projects. One project actively discouraged inviting media personnel to such events, fearing that their presence might provoke "grandstanding" by participants in a discussion-oriented event, precluding frank and open discussion.

I think there's an impact when a large group of people get the same information, in the same words, at the same time. . . .It makes the people in the hinterland feel like "I'm getting the same message as [the state capital]."

—project leader, commenting on a satellite telecommunications program

The major difficulty projects faced with the media, however, was attracting the interest and participation of media personnel. Local reporters were not always attracted by discussions of water quality or pesticide use. The definition of "newsworthy" often seemed less focused on what people should know and more on what people would read.

The projects' experience with the media led us to raise questions about the role and responsibility of the media in public policy education. Media personnel should be encouraged to move beyond simply covering "news" at the "sound bite" level to more in-depth reporting that would further public policy education. This role may be more appropriate for interpretive reporters who write editorials and can explore issues in more detail. Public policy educators seeking more in-depth media coverage might be more effective if they focused on engaging editorial writers who are willing to grapple with multiple perspectives on public policy issues in an in-depth manner.

Two projects held educational events specifically designed to educate media personnel themselves. One series of events—press backgrounders—targeted young agriculture reporters and members of the "urban press" who did not necessarily have a "food and fiber" background. These events sought to explain some of the complexities of farm policy. They were well received, even though there was not a direct link between a journalist's participation and the "copy" he needed to produce for publication. A second project held a "communicators workshop" for personnel in the religious media as well as for educators within project coalition members' own networks. Its goal was to examine specific public policy questions and encourage communicators to "disseminate information and promote education on agricultural trade within their networks."

Although the goals and strategies of these two events differed, some important similarities existed. Rather than inviting media personnel to report information, these events encouraged media personnel themselves to grapple with complex policy issues. Whereas the ultimate goal was to disseminate this information to their constituencies, the projects desired the press to have a greater understanding of the issues than could generally be obtained in their roles as reporters.

The difficulty with these events was primarily logistic. Media personnel, under great pressure to file their stories, found it difficult to take time to obtain background information that was not immediately convertible to print. Thus participation in the projects' media events required a supportive news agency that saw the long-term value of more educated journalists. Nevertheless, educating the media on public policy issues might help minimize oversimplification in reporting by developing reporters' appreciation of the complexities of public issues.

Although the media might be a target audience for public policy education, they are also potential partners with educators. The need for such collaboration is evident in the shortcomings of either group working alone. The media are often criticized for filling citizens with disconnected facts while failing to help them make enough sense of public life to be able to participate effectively (Graber 1988; Linsky 1988). Educational programs, designed in part to rectify such conditions, inevitably suffer from limits in the numbers of people reached. The vignette at right illustrates one possibility for collaboration between public policy educators and the media.

LESSON 13

Tensions between education and advocacy are inevitable in public policy education, but established guidelines saying "educate, don't advocate" did not give the projects adequate guidance.

All of the projects in the cluster endeavored to uphold the traditional public policy education model of informed debate, representative discussion, and consideration of all policy alternatives and their consequences. Nonetheless, most struggled to find and maintain the fine line between education and advocacy. In projects with advocacy organizations as coalition members, the education-advocacy tension was often overt. An early publication prepared by an advocacy organization in one project was criticized for being biased, but subsequent publications from the same organization were written in ways that did not explicitly

Sometimes I wonder if the younger ag reporters even have gardens.

—participant in one of the projects, a veteran agriculture journalist

We're not a catalyst for change, but a catalyst for others to bring about change.

—project staff

Vignette: An Emerging Partnership with Commercial Television

The Iowa State Public Policy Education Project (PPEP) made extensive use of satellite technology in delivering its public policy education events. From the beginning of the project, participants gathered in small groups in their communities for statewide public policy education events in nearly 100 downlink sites. They viewed videotaped interviews with players in the policy process, such as congressional representatives and lobbyists, followed by a statewide panel discussing the issues. Some events included a question-and-answer period with a local panel of experts. Participants were then able to engage in small-group discussions and to indicate their preferences on the issues discussed.

PPEP linked up with commercial television during the third year of the project. The previous satellite programs had received favorable feedback, and people had asked project staff, "Why aren't you on public TV?" The staff approached public television, but the latter was unable to cooperate because of its own budget cuts. The PPEP staff then approached a commercial television station that already had a statewide network for sportscasts. To fund the broadcasts, advertising was sold to pay for air time, and Kellogg funding covered the production costs.

Even before he was contacted, the station manager at the lead station in the network had already been "attracted to the quality of the programs" and "felt we could make money" by airing the programs in cooperation with PPEP. He noted that commercial television would not have produced a program like PPEP's. "We would have set the governor down and the leader of the loyal opposition and let them yell at each other. But only viewers who were already convinced would watch." By using PPEP's approach, however, these programs attracted a relatively large audience. Whereas the Nielsen ratings indicated 65,000 watched one program, in contrast to the typical 200,000 for a prime-time network program, the ratings compare favorably with the viewership for public television and are much higher than the 2,000 to 3,000 participants in previous satellite meetings.

The PPEP programs benefit the station in at least two major ways. First, the public affairs programming enhances the station's image. It can be very expensive, however, for the stations to produce good public affairs programming themselves. Their partnership with PPEP enables them to air good-quality programs that move the station away from presenting politics as "thirty-second announcements." Second, the stations make money, which is more necessary because of declining national revenues for commercial television as a result of competition from cable. Stations see the need to air more local programs, which attracts local and statewide advertising.

In policy education, controversy is not only inevitable, but desirable sometimes. . . .This can be frightening.

—project leader, on video about the project

I've tried to present both sides, but they keep sniffing out my biases. . . .They're in the business of not offending anyone. . . . One can't take a stand at all; that is strictly forbidden.

—materials developer for one of the projects, talking about extension

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take a stand. All organizations in all projects endeavored to adhere to the traditional public policy education model, at least for the project at hand. It was generally recognized that participants in project activities—and, in other contexts, coalition members themselves—could advocate as a result of what they learned, but that advocacy had no place in the projects themselves.

Education-advocacy tensions were often more subtle in projects with exclusively or predominantly extension coalition members. Extension educators were generally familiar with the traditional public policy education model, so that education versus advocacy was openly contested in only one extension-dominated project. Yet, underlying several projects were important disagreements about what constituted neutrality on the food and agriculture issues at hand. Such conflicts were typically initiated by spokespersons for production agriculture (objecting, for example, to alleged environmental, nutrition, or sustainable agriculture biases), but they often resulted in nonextension members of the coalitions or other outside observers maintaining that extension was not as unbiased on these issues as it claimed to be. One project whose dominant coalition member was extension struggled to hammer out curriculum materials acceptable to both environmental and agricultural interests. Materials for another project were repeatedly criticized by representatives of both traditional and more progressive viewpoints on food and agriculture issues, generating delays of over a year in materials development and pilot testing. These conflicts were often emotional, striking at the heart of basic assumptions about the ability of science to solve problems and provide the best answers. In most cases, the projects and especially their coalitions were viewed as steps in the right direction, helping to expand the range of issues, alternatives, constituencies, and interests represented in extension's educational programs.

It seemed to us that these conflicts were not over education versus advocacy so much as over balance versus bias. The issue was not whether a range of alternatives or viewpoints was being presented (it was, in each case) or whether a particular outcome was being advocated (it was not). Instead, the question was which alternatives or viewpoints were being presented and which ones were left out. Similar questions could be raised about the projects of coalitions whose key members were advocacy organizations. Project materials, though developed and presented in a neutral fashion, might selectively feature content leading most reasonable individuals to agree with a coalition's position on the issues.

Another source of dissatisfaction with the traditional public policy education model was the concern that at least some audiences needed more than the "neutral" presentation of information before they could translate what they learned into action. Some projects were criticized by field staff or participants in the educational activities for having "big bang" educational programs and then not being around to help with follow-up. Follow-up was less a concern in projects with audiences that were relatively familiar with the policy process, such as policymakers, policy professionals, or the press. In fact, the lack of attention to follow-up may be a legacy from previous educational programs that had more sophisticated audiences. Some projects, such as one with youth as its audience, encouraged or required participants to "do something" as a result of their learning. Several projects gave increasing attention to follow-up as time went by. Some asked discussion participants to develop policy recommendations. Others provided seed money to stimulate or facilitate follow-up at the local level or at least talked about bringing key individuals togther to discuss the next steps.

We believed that the "educate, don't advocate" guidelines needed to be rethought. Emphasis on the neutral presentation of alternatives and consequences, and the corresponding ban on advocacy, worked for some projects, but others increasingly found such approaches inadequate. They offered too little "so what?" for some audiences and, in other cases, failed to provide help when there were disagreements about what is neutral.

LESSON 14

Most projects agreed on a model of public policy education emphasizing what could be summarized as "balanced education plus follow-up," but the desirability of following that model is not yet settled.

How can you be as effective as Meryl Streep without being an advocate for one position? How can you advocate for informed choices?

—member of project advisory group

We don't have to answer the questions. We just have to figure out how to phrase the questions.

—project staff

By the end of this round of projects, staff and other coalition members from a majority of the projects seemed to agree on several points regarding education and advocacy. Some disagreement remained, much of it between extension educators and educators from advocacy organizations. The following points, on which there appeared to be substantial agreement, were heavily influenced by the extension educators, who constituted a majority of the staff and coalition members across the eleven projects.

- **It is all right to advocate for more information in the policy process on the grounds that more information leads to better decisions. It may also be okay to advocate for more participation on the grounds that it, too, leads to better decisions.** Advocating the latter, however, is riskier because policymakers or other influential participants in the policy process might not want more participation. Leaders of at least one project openly acknowledged that they avoided advocating increased participation even though they personally believed in it.

- **It is okay to advocate for attention to a particular topic and even for a particular definition of the topic as long as one does not advocate a particular outcome.** For example, the leaders of one project said they were advocates of attention to rural issues and of an approach to rural policy that was broader than most traditional definitions of rural development. "To that extent, we've got an agenda," they said. "But, when it comes to answering a question which we get frequently at both the state and federal level—'What do you guys think we should do?'—we're very straightforward in saying, 'That's up to you.'" Agreement with this position was not unanimous, however, and one project did relinquish the choice of which issues to address, turning it over to an essentially democratic process. Nonetheless, hardly anyone seriously questioned the practice of choosing in advance the issues to be addressed. As another project leader said, the project could have chosen different issues—ones of greater interest to urban people—but, then, what reason would there be for her to be the project leader?

- **If educational events or materials do advocate particular outcomes, they should be balanced by equally articulate statements of alternative positions.** This point was most often made in relation to conference agendas, in which the value of provocative speakers was sometimes recognized. It was generally acknowledged that perfect balance was rarely possible, but that there should be at least reasonable balance. One project leader described it as "treading evenly on everyone's toes." A related rule, suggested by at least one coalition member, was that advocacy should not be manipulative or antagonistic ("going beyond education").

- **The preferred alternative to advocating particular outcomes was balanced education, but what does that mean?** When we examined our data for language to describe it, we found such phrases as "clarifying issues," "explaining the environment," "outlining options," "describing innovative programs," and "asking questions." This conception of education was similar to the "alternatives and consequences" model familiar to many extension educators. But, for some at least, "balanced education" could also mean laying out a particular solution—and not necessarily a full range of options—as long as the educators served primarily to ask questions ("Is this something you want to consider?") and catalyze discussion.

- **There was widespread agreement that balanced education needed to be supplemented with some kind of follow-up assistance.** Coalition members in one project noted that action-oriented people are often frustrated by programs that "stop at education." In the end, many projects appeared to agree on this model of "balanced education plus follow-up," although actual attention to follow-up was delayed or remained limited in several projects. This prompted us to wonder if fear of advocacy sometimes leads public policy educators to be less helpful to their audiences than they might be.

  Not everyone agreed with the model of "balanced education plus follow-up," however. Disagreement occurred at two ends of a continuum. At least some staff or coalition members maintained that balanced educa-

Do we take neutral material and "baptize" it, so that some organizations emphasize the family, others the poor? Could we get people to use the materials if part of the dynamic is that the advocacy positions various groups hold are made explicit?

—coalition member, wrestling with the question of how to get project materials disseminated and used

My problem is that it seemed self-indulgent and a luxury to do "pure" public policy education.

—project leader, commenting on the idea of neutral, "objective" education

tion is sufficient without follow-up when a topic is very controversial so that interest in it is high or when experts and lay people agree on the existence of a problem. At the other end of the continuum was the argument that, even with follow-up, education without advocacy will not be effective.

The latter argument was most common among advocacy organizations but was not limited to them. The staff of one project with advocacy organizations in its coalition maintained that nonadvocacy not only was a frustration for advocacy organizations, but failed to serve the purposes of education itself. In their view, effective public policy education required advocacy so as to provide an "outlet for people's activism and passion." They considered Kellogg's nonadvocacy requirement unrealistic and unhelpful. Leaders of another project with advocacy organizations in its coalition said they were still "unsettled" about the education-advocacy issue. Most members of their coalition concluded that balanced education was a desirable way to make advocacy better informed or of forcing people to think. A minority of that coalition disagreed, however, doubting whether nonadvocacy was sufficient to meet the needs of advocacy organizations. As one coalition member said, "A balanced group will get nothing done." Even extension-dominated projects had some disagreement about whether advocacy—and the resulting controversy it can generate in an educational program—inhibited learning by being a distraction or promoted it by stimulating interest.

We naturally learned more about education from this cluster of projects than we did about advocacy. We could see the limits as well as the value of "pure" education, but we lacked the same opportunity to test the value or limits of advocacy. Advocacy could certainly promote one-sided and poorly informed action, but presumably it could also promote solutions that result from a genuine effort to understand and reflect the full range of perspectives on an issue. Would that be more or less desirable than education that was so balanced that it deflated people's enthusiasm and produced no action at all? It seemed to us that the case was not yet closed. Projects should have the flexibility to continue exploring variations from the model of education narrowly defined.

People act from emotion, not just from the facts. That's why scientists make terrible salespeople.

—workshop speaker, a public official

Maybe we [academics] are not as sensitive about activist things, or about training for activist things. Or maybe we've never been an activist and don't know how to do it.

—project leader

THE DILEMMA OF BALANCE

A CASE STUDY

The Global Food Web (GFW) project began with a week-long youth conference in which teens focused on the relationship between human nutrition, food supply, and the environment. Rather than simply learning content, the young people were encouraged to find ways to become involved in these issues in their local communities. As one aspect of this involvement, teen teams were asked to "peer teach" the material to other students at home.

We met Billy and Cathy after they had completed an hour-long program for 300 sixth graders on the GFW. Billy began to explain what they did with the students. "We took the information and activities we learned at the GFW youth conference last summer, and taught that to the sixth grade classes. Nutrition, food supply, and the environment. . .in an hour! There is a lot of material to cover, but it never occurred to us to leave any part out, since they are so interconnected. We began by discussing basic nutrition and then involved teachers and other adults in a lap sit exercise illustrating the six basic nutrients and the consequences of removing some of them. We tried to help the students see that malnutrition is sometimes caused by not eating the right foods."

Cathy added. "This part might seem kind of boring at first, but something happened at the conference last summer that showed us just how important it is to understand basic nutrition. This rock singer came and started trying to convince us to become vegetarians. We'd just learned about nutrition, and I didn't see how we could get all the basic nutrients we need if we did. We talked about his views the rest of the week! His perspective definitely made me think. I guess I can like his music without agreeing with him."

* * *

"I think students need more controversy in conferences like the Global Food Web," commented Joanne, a member of the coalition for the GFW project. "They need to be able to debate issues, and learn to separate fact from opinion. This is where the best learning takes place. However, when it came to the GFW curriculum, while there was plenty of controversy within the project coalition—particularly with respect to the environmental curriculum's portrayal of agriculture—all of it was removed by the time the teens were exposed to the issues. Think of what the teens might have learned if they had participated in *that* debate. . . ."

* * *

Susan, the GFW project director, shook her head. "Boy, was I naive. I had no idea how strong the animosity was between environmentalists and agriculturalists. Let me tell you about that fall meeting where the project coalition met to finalize the curriculum for the GFW. The human nutrition and food supply curriculum, written by a team of extension specialists, had finally been approved after being examined 'with a fine-tooth comb'. The environmental curriculum, primarily written by specialists outside of extension, was on the table. An extension specialist in production agriculture who had recently joined the coalition stated, 'I'm concerned that there is too much opinion here, and not enough fact—too much mass media and emotion. You can't just talk about eliminating pesticides. The food supply side has to be considered. There needs to be balance in this curriculum. I'm not supporting this program if it's going to hurt agriculture.'

"After much discussion, another member responded. 'We have to face the fact that this curriculum is a product by committee. I think balance will be impossible to achieve. Every time a new person enters the equation the average changes and the balance moves. I think the best we can do is arrive at a compromise.'"

* * *

The reactions of an outside specialist who reviewed the GFW curriculum illustrate the tenuous nature of "balance." "The struggles with the GFW curriculum are really ironic. In my opinion, the environment curriculum focuses on the issues where experts agree. The overall effect on students, I would think, would be a clear understanding of environmental issues. The food supply curriculum—which didn't engender nearly as much internal controversy—is less representative. The curriculum maintains that enough food can be produced. Distribution is the problem. But more production, both within the United States and abroad, is presented as the only solution. Other alternatives, such as population control, are studiously avoided.

"In my view, this is much less 'balanced' than the environment curriculum, but perhaps was less controversial because people with similar perspectives wrote and reviewed the material. In neither case were the teens engaged in the controversy, but for different reasons. In the environment curriculum, the controversy was previously resolved, and in the food supply curriculum, the controversy was essentially ignored."

* * *

Billy said, "We always like learning about the environment, but what stood out for me from the GFW conference is the food supply curriculum. The real problem with world hunger is a distribution problem. . .we have enough food. We had learned about nutrition and the environment in school, but I didn't know anything about food supply before the GFW conference. We did one of my favorite activities on food supply for the sixth graders this morning. We start with a couple of people in a square, and toss them some candy. Then we keep adding people to the square, but toss them the same amount of candy. It really illustrates that more food needs to get to countries with growing populations."

Cathy added, "Learning about the food supply helped me understand more clearly how important it is to protect the environment. We did another exercise this morning with a melon that illustrates the small fraction of the earth suitable and used for food production and the tinier fraction of fresh water. Agriculture and protecting the environment need to go hand in hand."

* * *

Susan observed, "We eventually got the controversy out of the curriculum, but I think some of the life went with it. We obviously did not plan to have the rock star advocate vegetarianism, and about died while he was up there, but his remarks really energized the teens, and put back some of the fire that was missing from the curriculum itself."

* * *

"The traditional model for teaching is to present the truth," Joanne observed. "But when it comes to public policy issues, I think we need to leave it a little more open, teaching kids how to think, rather than what to think. Teens learn quickly not to challenge 'the truth,' and while they do learn, they are really motivated when they have to think on their own. However, it's more risky to teach this way, because we lose control of the outcomes. But the teens may initiate better outcomes than the ones we carefully orchestrate."

* * *

Cathy explained, "When we got home from the conference, we brainstormed all of the realistic possibilities for ways we could get involved in the issues we had learned about. Teaching the younger kids has been important, but we also wanted to get directly involved in the issues themselves."

Billy said, "I thought getting involved would be difficult, until I realized that these kind of issues are right here, not only in other countries. For example, one of the problems we have here in our county is a toxic waste dump that has been seeping into the water supply of one housing development. These people weren't getting any clean water at all, so we collected drinking water for them. We also researched the problems with toxic waste dumps and got our facts straight, then went to a commissioners meeting. . . ."

"I was so mad!" Cathy interrupted. "The commissioners treated us like little kids. I said, 'What about my future?' 'What about my kids?' I think their attitude changed a bit, but they were under other pressures. But we keep checking in to see what they're doing about the problem. We're learning that we can have an impact on these issues."

* * *

As we reflected on our conversations with these participants in the GFW, we noted that much of the struggle at the project coalition level was focused on developing "balanced" curricula. This underscores the idea that teaching youth to think correctly about these issues is most important, even though the definitions of "correct thinking" on any issue are never static. And, although the teens obviously gained insights from their experience with the content, they were more energized by learning that they could form their own judgments and act on this newly acquired knowledge. We are left with the question, how might this project have been different if the conference had devoted more time to teaching students how to think rather than what to think about these issues?

IMPACTS

What difference did the projects make? In this chapter, we discuss lessons regarding the projects' outcomes. Data on outcomes were taken from the projects' own internal evaluations, supplemented by interviews and observations by the cluster evaluation team. Because of the Kellogg and Farm Foundations' understandable interest in the potential for continuity beyond the termination of Kellogg funding, this chapter also includes lessons on sustainability. We begin with a discussion of the projects' evaluation strategies and some lessons in regard to that topic.

LESSON 15

The projects developed strategies for evaluating project implementation, coalition development, and project impacts. But more purposeful attention to evaluation design would be helpful at the beginning of project development.

Although all projects conducted evaluation activities in compliance with grant requirements, the scope and depth of these evaluations varied. On one end of the spectrum a project conducted an evaluation at the end of the project because it was required but viewed it as an annoyance. On the other end a project's evaluation team participated fully in the project throughout the grant period.

The eleven projects evaluated different aspects of their activities, including events and materials, progress of the project as a whole, and coalition development. Some projects also focused on project impacts, particularly those on individual participants. Several methods were used to evaluate public policy education endeavors, including paper and pencil surveys, self-reflection, and journals.

Many projects evaluated the implementation of their activities, both events and materials, by means of paper and pencil surveys at the completion of a project event or by reviews of educational materials. Most of these included participant ratings of speakers and activities as well as participants' assessments of their increased knowledge of issues, changes in attitudes, and plans for follow-up action.

To assess overall implementation strategies, some projects viewed self-reflection at the end of an event as an important mechanism for determining midcourse changes. This informal self-evaluation was conducted either by staff or by a committee appointed by the organizations in the project's coalition. Staff on two projects kept a project activity journal that documented implementation activities and decisions throughout the course of the project. This enabled project personnel to monitor progress as well as to have a record for retrospective review.

Two projects developed innovative approaches for monitoring and evaluating coalition development. One of these is summarized in the following vignette. The other project conducted telephone interviews with coalition members focused on coalition building in the project. This project also conducted a final "endings and beginnings" conference at which coalition partners could report on project activities and share lessons they had learned.

Projects also made efforts to track and document the impacts of their public policy education endeavors on individual participants. Few purposeful attempts were made to evaluate the impacts on the public policy issues, although this was recognized as important.

Some projects defined exposure to issues as an outcome and kept track of the number of people who participated in or were reached by the project. One project documented the number of people participating in its downlink satellite conferences. In another project, county teams of teens were expected to "peer teach" material received at a conference to at least 150 others. After the first three months of the project, county team leaders reported that over 400,000 other people had been reached in this manner. This number was established through documentation from the county team leaders describing their activities and attendance figures. Another project employed a clipping service to track news of the project in the media.

To assess impacts on the participants themselves, self-report data were used. Some projects did follow-up phone interviews or surveys, and at least one project conducted a follow-up group interview with participants. The interviews and surveys asked whether project events affected them in

After that one meeting, they would have made us *eat* the forms.

—project leader, on hearing that some projects were asking participants to fill out evaluation forms following each educational event

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Vignette: TDP Evaluation Strategies

The Trade and Development Project (TDP) hired two professional evaluators in March 1989. This evaluation team began by assisting the project in establishing a working coalition. They interviewed the members of the project's oversight committee as to their goals, objectives, and expectations with respect to the project. These goals were "rich and varied" but fell into categories, which the oversight committee placed in priority order. After several revisions, the oversight committee arrived at a common set of goals.

These goals were then operationalized into an "objectives-based evaluation plan." There were too many objectives for the evaluators to examine on their own, so the oversight committee agreed to work with the evaluators in identifying representative groups for field testing the materials as well as developing a process for documenting, tracking, and reporting results.

This working arrangement between the oversight committee and the project evaluators became a critical dynamic in this project, which struggled with disseminating its materials. Because the evaluators were carefully monitoring the materials being sent out, they quickly identified and brought the dissemination problem to the attention of the coalition. As a result, although the evaluation team fulfilled the more traditional roles of monitoring field tests, observing events, and surveying participants, it also became involved in a rather nontraditional evaluation capacity. This team attended every oversight committee meeting and, in the initial stages, frequently found itself cast in the role of the "heavy," holding oversight committee members accountable for the dissemination and evaluation-related work they had agreed to do. On occasion, the evaluation team also reminded the committee of their common goals and helped to keep the coalition on its agreed-upon course.

The evaluation team conducted a "midcourse" and final evaluation as well as ongoing monitoring of project materials and events. All of the evaluation efforts in this project were discussed by the oversight committee, and the findings were used to help the coalition make decisions. These evaluations helped the coalition redirect its energies and explore alternative strategies for reaching its goals.

ways such as increased attention to the issues, changes in views, participants' use of information provided, and any activities undertaken since participating in project events.

Despite the attention given to collecting evaluative data, only one project articulated an underlying evaluation design. Because evaluation designs make different assumptions about what is "true" and how those truths can be known, adopting such a design early on would have enabled projects to be clearer about what "counted" as data, including what constituted project outcomes. They would also have had a road map for planning the evaluation methods used. An evaluation design would have provided criteria for assessing the quality of project findings. Complying with those criteria would have enabled project staff to be more confident of their evaluation results and would have given outside observers a standard for making their own judgments concerning the projects' implementation and outcomes.

The. . .nonthreatening and helpful approach to evaluation created a positive attitude among project participants toward the project as an experiment in public policy education.

—project leader, in final report

You shoot at whatever flutters and claim whatever falls.

—project leader, asked how he can tell whether particular impacts can be attributed to the project

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Public policy education projects need to include self-reflection and careful documentation of decisions as evaluation methods. Projects in the cluster were probably engaging in many such discussions but not necessarily viewing them as evaluation or recording them in a form that was helpful to them in their evaluation efforts.

LESSON 16

Several viable staffing models were used for evaluation, but project staff were often the sole evaluators of their projects. That practice should be reduced in future projects.

The projects adopted four different staffing models to evaluate their endeavors:

1. ***Project staff as evaluators.*** Project staff often developed and administered instruments for participant feedback and conducted ongoing informal process evaluations as their projects developed.
2. ***Internal coalition committee as evaluators.*** A committee developed the evaluation instruments and provided ongoing evaluative feedback to project staff.
3. ***External evaluators.*** External evaluators were contracted to develop all evaluation strategies, conduct evaluations, analyze the findings, and report findings to the coalition.
4. ***Combination of external and internal evaluators.*** In one project, external evaluators were contracted to develop and implement an evaluation strategy for project events during the project's first year, and that strategy was then replicated by project staff in later events. Other projects hired external evaluators to conduct outcome evaluations but conducted ongoing project improvement evaluation themselves.

Although we believe that many approaches can be viable, we concluded that project staff should not be the sole evaluators of their projects. Even if they are able to be objective, project staff do not have enough time to evaluate their projects adequately. Future projects should include enough money in their budgets to elicit evaluation assistance separate from project staff, even if it is internal to the organization or coalition.

LESSON 17

Impacts on participants in project activities were reported far more frequently than impacts on public issues or on the policy-making process, even though the latter were clearly of interest to the educators. In the future, more emphasis should be given to the assessment of issue or process impacts.

The projects generated an impressive and diverse array of reported outcomes. Throughout their evaluation reports, other project documents, and our own cluster evaluation interview logs, many statements described project outcomes. Some came from participants' responses to evaluation instruments; some were self-reports by individuals we interviewed; others were impressions or observations by project staff.

Analysis of these statements yielded forty-five categories of outcomes, the majority of which were participant outcomes. Most were impacts on project audiences, but some were impacts on coalition members. Most of the audience outcomes were references to individuals, but some were impacts on groups or organizations. Examples of participant outcomes included

- increased confidence (less intimidated by experts and prominent people)
- intent to network with others in attendance
- increased awareness of the persistent problems our environment faces
- recently appointed head of a state agency commented that she learned a lot preparing for her role as a discussion leader on an issue that "was not my background at the time or an area of interest"; later, she was able "to handle these issues better in setting policy recommendations for the governor"
- increased knowledge about groundwater
- increased overall economic intelligence of rural and urban writers and editors who cover issues related to agricultural and rural policy
- understanding of the shift in emphasis from production and marketing to environmental concerns in the farm bill

Who knows how long it would take to get this kind of exposure on my own!

—study group participant in one of the project

It was like listening to a radio talk show, listening to everyone's opinion, but no action was taken.

—participant in a project's roundtable discussionss

- sense of "hopefulness" among the group at the end that they could, in fact, influence policy
- "made us examine some of our silly competitive tendencies"
- "I can better appreciate the farm point of view and recognize that farmers are concerned about many of the same issues that I am"
- "I think I have become more tolerant, since I realize this is a complex problem and not one that will change overnight"
- a county supervisor became more interested in developing recycling programs; he had opposed the environmental movement but now realizes that problems have to be dealt with
- "people outside the agriculture community are more open-minded about environmental problems than I thought"
- became very worried that it is harder to bring views together
- 86 percent shared the materials with others
- in waste management, people who attended the downlinks have taken the lead in getting their local governments to comply with the state law
- got on a public issues committee as a result of one of the programs
- one participant was instrumental in reversing a community decision preventing out-of-county waste in the county landfill after learning about the economics of regional landfilling

In addition to participant outcomes, there is an assumption in public policy education that changes at the individual level will result somehow in "better" decisions. That assumption suggests the importance of also examining actual impacts on policy-making, and a substantial number of issue or process outcomes were in fact reported in project documents and interviews. These differed from participant outcomes because they concerned changes in the issue or process rather than changes to particular individuals, groups, or organizations.[2] Examples included

- increased visibility of the issues by producing high-quality publications disseminated to thousands of people
- involving outlying areas and people not usually involved in activities related to these issues
- issues reported from a broader perspective by news media
- rural health, rural education, agriculture, and industrial recruiting interests are not yet part of the same lobby, "but we're certainly moving in that direction"
- the state office for rural health was established much more quickly than if the conference had not been held
- two school districts that had originally been antagonistic viewed the program together and are now discussing cooperation
- congressional legislation has been drafted for $40 million worth of R&D on the trade corridor and border crossing impediments; this development can be traced directly to Anderson's research, the need for which was identified at the 1991 conference
- language (on groundwater protection) drafted for the county plan is expected to be adopted
- since the program, three more communities in the county have started curbside recycling

The predominance of participant outcomes reflected a traditional view of education as something that happens to individuals (or to separate groups or organizations) and not as an interactive community activity. It also reflected the absence of evaluation strategies aimed at assessing impacts on anything other than individuals. Despite this absence, several projects reported such impacts, usually in the form of anecdotal evidence. We viewed this evidence as an acceptable data source that could have been used more strategically. For example, when a story of such an impact reached project staff, it would have been helpful to trace it to its source and to ask questions such as, "What was it about the project event that contributed to this impact on the issue?" or "What would have happened with respect to this issue if the project event had not occurred?" Systematically documenting these responses not only could establish

[2] The distinction between participant and issue or process outcomes was sometimes ambiguous. For example, one project reported "community benefits" such as increased commitment to recycling, but it was unclear whether these were best thought of as separate individual actions or as a genuine collective or community phenomenon, reflected, for example, in increased support for recycling programs. Another example would be changes in attitudes toward issues or policy positions, not by rank-and-file citizens, but by a key policymaker. Is that "merely" an individual participant outcome or an impact on the policy-making process? Fortunately, such ambiguities were the exception rather than the rule, so the distinction was not hard to make in most cases.

Maybe we're a little more results-oriented than you drive for at an academic institution.

—project participant, a small-town business person

By the end of the day, they had some common philosophies, some common beliefs. . .suddenly, all these walls were coming down.

—project staff, describing one of the project's study groups

Vignette: Issue or Process Outcomes from Two Conferences in Montana

Two conferences held by the Upper Midwest project in Montana—one on United States–Canada trade and one on rural health care—were said to have had important impacts on policy decisions in the state. The cluster evaluation team visited Montana to learn about issue or process impacts and how they occur. We talked with several individuals who either helped plan the conferences, participated in them, or were involved in follow-up activities. We asked the following questions:

What happened as a result of these conferences?

In the case of United States–Canada trade, people reportedly left the conference realizing they needed to "get serious" about free trade and committed to "take it [to] the next step." The Montana representative on the project's coalition said, "People were cornering me, saying, 'We've got to do something.'" A Canadian official offered to host another conference. A steering committee was established; further research was commissioned; a second conference was held; and a third one was being planned at the time of our visit. People from all over the West were calling to see if they could attend. And a member of the Montana Congressional delegation expressed interest in the research and subsequently introduced a bill to fund trade corridor and border crossing improvements. "You want an outcome?" the coalition representative said. "If that legislation passes, I don't know of another thing that would have more impact on the well-being of Montana!"

Regarding rural health care, we were told that a State Office for Rural Health and a Montana Rural Health Association were being established as direct outcomes of the conference. A bill to provide state funding for the Office for Rural Health was introduced. Although it did not pass, it was expected to be reintroduced in the next legislative session.

What was it about the conferences that led to these results?

Regarding United States–Canada trade, a speaker's presentation on a successful trade corridor in the Red River Valley apparently provided a concept that people could rally around. Timing was also critical. Interviewees said several related things were happening around the time of the conference. For example, a recently ratified free trade agreement was of great interest and the governor had been focusing attention on Montana's trade relations with Canada. The conference brought together the "right mix of people," and the speaker on the Red River corridor "planted the seed." The number and mix of participants was said to be critical, helping convince participants that, "if all these people are interested," the concept must be important and has a good chance of success.

As for rural health care, when three discussion groups at the conference were asked to develop policy recommendations, all three identified an office for rural health as their first recommendation.

What would have happened if the conferences had not been held?

In the case of United States–Canada trade, the people we talked with said promotion of one-on-one exchanges between U.S. and Canadian business people, which had already been under way, would have continued, but the trade corridor concept as such would not have come into focus. The conference gave rise to a more formal structure to promote trade corridor improvements and an identifiable group of people working on it.

Regarding rural health care, interviewees said the Office for Rural Health and the Rural Health Association would have been established anyway, but it would not have happened so quickly. The convergence of all three discussion groups on the same recommendation "gave us advocacy we could use" and thereby speeded up the decision-making process.

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connections between the project as a whole and impacts on the issues, but could help discover specific aspects of a project that would have the most impact on the issues.

A second suggestion for evaluating project impacts on the issues is to involve people who are already in a position to observe such impacts. For example, several projects established advisory groups composed of people involved in the issue under consideration. It would have been a natural extension of those groups' involvement with the project to conduct focus group interviews afterward to get their impressions of the project's impact on the issues. News reporters covering the relevant topics might also provide helpful observations about possible impacts on the issues.

Paying attention to impacts beyond those on individual participants is important. Although documenting them can be a slippery endeavor, we advocate using and extending available resources to maximize the quality of data on these topics. Careful thought could be given to the questions to be asked. For example, knowing that a project influenced a particular decision may be less useful than knowing whether the resulting decision was based on more information, was participated in by greater numbers of people, or was acceptable to a wider range of interests than would likely have been the case in the absence of the project. More systematic or carefully collected information on what is happening to the issues or the process, as well as to project participants, can be useful for program management decisions. It should also be helpful in addressing the often troublesome accountability questions about the impact or value of public policy education.

LESSON 18

Issue or process outcomes were more likely to occur when the scope of a project's audience corresponded with the policy arena in which the issues addressed by the project were resolved. More attention should be given to this relationship in future projects.

The projects varied strikingly in their tendency to report issue or process outcomes. Five projects reported numerous such outcomes, whereas six did not. Some projects reporting issue or process outcomes focused on issues decided in local policy-making arenas such as groundwater decisions in Winnishiek County, Iowa. This caused the leaders of one project to conclude that issue or process outcomes were more likely in projects with a local focus, where the scale of the project better matched the resources available within the time frame of the project. According to this reasoning, comparable impacts in the state or national arena would have required a longer time frame—and, hence, sustainability beyond the period of Kellogg funding.

Other projects, however, demonstrated that issue or process outcomes were also possible in the state policy-making arena. One project reported impacts on state rural development policy, another on state decisions regarding health care and United States–Canada trade. This suggested that the difference was not simply whether the focus was local, but whether the project's audience included a cross-section of participants involved in the appropriate policy arena. The project that reported issue or process outcomes in rural development included a cross-section of state rural development interests in its audience, whereas the one reporting impacts on health care and United States–Canada trade decisions involved similarly appropriate cross-sections of state health care and trade interests.

Contrasting situations—in which issue or process outcomes were less likely—were illustrated by two projects whose participants learned about issues in the national policy arena, but then returned home to work either on state or local issues related to the national ones or on the national issues themselves. In either case, the impact of the projects at the issue or process level was likely to be diffused. For example, in one project whose focus was on the national farm bill, participants might return home and attempt to influence policy-making in Washington. But, regardless of how much they were affected by the project, they would still represent only a tiny fraction of the influences on the farm bill. Alternatively, they might return home wishing to apply their new knowledge to state or local issues but might have little impact because no one else in the same state or locality had participated in the project. In either case, individual learning as a result of the project might be substantial, but issue or process impacts would likely be negligible.

> At the minimum, we increase the information out there. But we don't really know if an increase in good information actually leads to greater involvement and participation. . . .We really don't know the impact of the project in the trenches.
>
> **—project leader**

> It was a surprise for the environmentalists that there were farmers who shared their goals.
>
> **—extension specialist who participated in a project's roundtable discussions**

The implications of this finding were not completely clear. On the one hand, issue or process outcomes were more likely if a project's audiences corresponded with the policy arena in which the issues addressed were resolved. State issues or policy-making processes could be affected by projects with statewide audiences but not by those whose audiences were confined to a single county or region of the state. Likewise, national issues or processes could be affected, but only by projects with a national audience. We did not assume, however, that projects without such a correspondence of audience and policy arena should never be undertaken. It is possible that projects seeking to reach ordinary citizens or to mobilize new participants in the policy-making process can best enhance their effectiveness by working at the local level. (That conclusion was reached by more than one project in the present cluster.) In that sense, it would often be appropriate for state or local projects to educate about national issues—or for local projects to educate about state issues. But such projects should have realistic expectations regarding outcomes at the issue or process level, at least in the short run. Starting at the local level to influence national policy could be a worthy and perhaps necessary strategy but would likely require sustainability beyond the normal three- or four-year time frame.

LESSON 19

Different outcomes appeared to be associated with different stages of development in the issues addressed by the projects. Future projects should devote more attention to this relationship.

Our data revealed at least a modest tendency for the outcomes reported by particular projects to cluster in different stages, but the patterns were not clear enough to make much sense of them. Not all participant outcomes were directly related to public policy. Some, such as expanding one's personal knowledge, making contacts, or learning things that were used in one's work, might have little or no consequence for public policy. In addition, a significant number of the reported participant outcomes were oriented toward educating others rather than directly affecting public policy-making. But most of the remaining participant outcome categories could be arrayed in a sequence that roughly approximated a series of steps or stages in the policy-making process (Table 1). Although the placement of individual items in such a list was sufficiently arbitrary that different people would probably come up with different lists, there would likely be considerable agreement, at least on the general pattern.

Projects varied in their tendency to report outcomes related to different stages. Only three projects reported participants gaining awareness of problems or issues. Nearly all had reports of participants gaining knowledge. Several reported increases in participants' motivation or commitment and instances of people learning about other perspectives. Finally, most projects had reports of participants attempting to influence decisions. One might like to think that each project emphasized outcomes that were appropriate given the stage of development of the specific issue or issues being addressed, but we lacked sufficient data about the issues themselves to explore such a possibility very thoroughly.[3]

The issue or process outcome categories could also be arrayed in a sequence corresponding roughly to stages in the policy-making process (Table 2). Different projects emphasized outcomes in different stages, but, as in the case of participant outcomes, the patterns were not exceptionally clear. Of the five projects with significant numbers of issue or process outcomes, three reported outcomes throughout the policy-making process, whereas one emphasized the earlier stages of increased awareness, creating new organizations, and increasing participation, and another emphasized the later stages of increasing interaction, developing proposals, and seeing legislation enacted.

Although there is not much evidence on which to base conclusions, these last two cases were consistent with the objectives of the respective projects—one to empower previously uninvolved people (hence emphasizing early stages of policy-making), the other to broaden the influences on rural development policy-making (emphasizing the later stages).

The farmers were surprised that we weren't all flaming radicals.

—environmentalist who participated in the same discussions

[3] There seemed to be a slight tendency for projects to report *either* gains in motivation or commitment *or* learning about other perspectives, but not both. Two projects reported outcomes in both categories, but four others reported outcomes in only one or the other. It is plausible that learning about other perspectives tends to weaken motivation or commitment and, conversely, that motivation or commitment is easier to develop or maintain when people can ignore countervailing arguments, but we had only limited evidence on this point.

TABLE 1

Participant Outcome Categories Arrayed in Rough Order of Stages in the Policy-Making Process

Personal growth, personal knowledge, gained skills or confidence
Used in one's own work something that was learned
Made contacts, networked, began working together with others
Gained awareness of problems or issues
Gained knowledge about an issue or situation
Learned about the political process
Saw that one can make a difference
Motivated to take action
Saw need for more information or education—for self
Saw need for more information or education—for others
Learned about or saw the value of working together
Discussed with others something that was learned
Became more committed
Learned about other perspectives
Learned about other perspectives and saw more conflict than expected
Learned about other perspectives and saw more room for agreement
Engaged in communication between citizens and policymakers
Gained broader view of an issue or saw connections between issues
Formulated a personal position on an issue
Changed one's ideas about an issue
Took some kind of action but of a nonpolitical nature
Educated or shared information with others
Saw the potential for long-term results
Attempted to influence decision making on an issue
Joined a board or committee
Successfully influenced a decision

TABLE 2

Issue or Process Outcome Categories Arrayed in Rough Order of Stages in the Policy-Making Process

Increased awareness of a problem or issue
Stimulated action on an issue or the creation of new organizations
Increased participation in an issue
Information used by participants in the political process
Influenced media coverage of an issue
Increased interaction among diverse interests
Increased consensus, common understanding, or shared sense of urgency
Structure developed for taking action on an issue
Meetings held to investigate or resolve an issue
Moved an issue onto the political agenda, attracted more attention by policymakers
Legislative proposal developed
Legislation enacted
Program implemented

It seemed to us that project objectives and implementation strategies should "fit" with the stage of development of the issues being addressed. Careful thought along these lines should be a part of program planning. Evaluation should also focus on the match between objectives and strategies on the one hand and the stage of development of an issue on the other. Defining project objectives as helping to move participants or an issue along the sequence of stages in the policy-making process might be a useful alternative to the typically frustrating challenge of thinking or talking intelligently about educational program impacts on the ultimate resolution of an issue.

LESSON 20

Attention to capacity building within public policy educators' own organizations is another important consideration, in addition to participant and issue or process outcomes.

A third and final major group of outcome categories included capacity-building outcomes for public policy educators themselves. Reported impacts on coalition members were included here if they involved changes in the capacity to carry out public policy education effectively. These outcomes fell into five categories:

1. ***building relationships with other key actors*** such as the governor's office, relevant state agencies and interest groups, or other educators (e.g., relationships between Cooperative Extension and the League of Women Voters);
2. ***developing knowledge, skill, experience, or confidence—***including demonstrating to colleagues in extension that it is possible to conduct unbiased educational programs on controversial issues, drawing subject-matter specialists into the public policy arena, or increasing League of Women Voters representatives' understanding of agricultural audiences;
3. ***enhancing visibility or reputation or building broader audiences;***
4. ***influencing or assisting other educational efforts in the educators' own organizations,*** such as promoting attention to certain topics, serving as a model for other educational programs, or providing useful resource materials;
5. ***influencing related developments in the educators' organizations,*** such as selecting issues for extension to focus on, preparing field staff for the teamwork needed in "issues programming," or developing proposals for new projects.

Considerable attention was given to such outcomes in project documents and in our interviews. Such attention was not surprising given the limited development of public policy education as a field of practice and the consequent need for educators to work on their own long-term capacity to implement public policy education at the same time as they attend to the immediate requirements of particular educational programs.

Although accomplishment of capacity-building outcomes and of participant and issue or process outcomes ought to be complementary, there was a danger of paying too much attention to one dimension at the expense of the other. On the one hand, educators could pay so much attention to whether their programs were liked or respected that the program's educational quality might suffer. On the other hand was the danger of implementing excellent programs without, in the end, enhancing the capacity to do similar programs on other issues or to build on a one-shot success. The latter was particularly likely when special temporary staff were hired to run a program. A balance must be sought between these extremes.

LESSON 21

Realistic and significant targets for sustainability from public policy education endeavors are changes in the way participating organizations understand, value, or conduct their work (i.e., capacity-building outcomes). Creating new organizational legacies is a legitimate secondary purpose of public policy education projects and should be a primary target for sustainability. This, in turn, requires that the institutional participants in the projects be learning organizations.

I'm proudest of the fact that we generated a new audience for extension.

—project leader

Like most externally funded applied social science programs, one requirement of project funding, reporting, and accountability in the present cluster of projects was project *sustainability*, that is, a project's ability to continue in some form after the cessation of external funding.

For public policy education projects, however, the concept of sustainability presented two problems. First, it could be argued that the most successful public policy education projects, once completed, were no longer needed. Successful projects accomplished their educational mission, thereby either invoking a new and different need for education, catalyzing action, or shifting the grounds and values on which the issue was being debated. Thus, in many specific cases, sustainability of the project itself was neither warranted nor desired. Second, the boundaries between aspects of the projects that were sustained and project outcomes—particularly outcomes other than impacts on participants—were ambiguous. For example, was increased interaction among diverse interests on a given issue a process outcome, an important aspect of the project that was sustained, or both? And was an organization's increased desire and ability to work collaboratively with potential antagonists a capacity-building outcome, an important project legacy (under the heading of sustainability), or both?

These questions arose during our analysis of project sustainability. With further reflection came the insight that changes in organizational legacies might be more important than perpetuation of a particular project.

What kinds of things were reported as sustained?

- ***project materials.*** At least four projects pointed to the materials they developed as a significant legacy. Coalition members in one project were particularly proud that their materials have a "long shelf life." This project, however, had considerable difficulty disseminating its materials. A long shelf-life has little value if the materials remain on the shelf. In contrast, in another project, one set of materials had to be updated between final draft and publication dates. And in a third project, the materials appeared to be valued as much for their role in legitimizing the project as in disseminating educational information about the issues.
- ***new organizational legacies (capacity-building outcomes).*** Such legacies could be subdivided into three groups:

1. Changes in the structures organizations use to envision, organize, or administer their work
   - One project's coalition was sustained as a standing committee of a professional organization, thereby ensuring continued state-level attention to educational needs on water policy issues
   - Working relationships between two participating organizations continued beyond a project
   - New working relationships with the media were established during a project and continued afterward
   - Members of a project's coalition developed a commitment to work as a coalition again in the future
2. Changes in how the work of organizations gets done
   - One project's educational process (promotion of dialogue via roundtables) was adopted by other sectors of one of the participating organizations in their educational outreach work
   - Project materials were incorporated in existing curricula and activities of the main participating organization in the project
   - Project materials were subsequently used by teachers who participated in the project's conferences in their own classrooms
3. Changes in what work gets done
   - A participating organization continued its newly directed attention to agricultural issues beyond the lifetime of a project
   - A new professional development opportunity created as part of a project for the members of one participating organization was continued after the project was over
   - Local capacity was developed to continue activities of a project (e.g., state and local workshops), and partial funding was secured for project continuation

I guess it's kept me thinking about public policy education and how important it is. I'm even more adamant in having people understand that things are multifaceted.

—extension consumer science specialist who collaborated with one of the projects

All of these examples represent the potential for one or more participating organizations to do things differently after the grant period ended—to work collaboratively rather than alone, to include rather than exclude particular issues on their agenda, to consider previously ignored groups as part of their target audience, to engage in open dialogue before making decisions and commitments. In a public policy education context, such potential changes in how organizations do their work were significant. Moreover, they represented realistic legacies from a single project effort.

Strong, healthy organizations brought existing legacies to an adventure such as public policy education. Used thoughtfully, these legacies could help ground new, creative, innovative, risky ventures in practices with an established record of success. Beyond building on strengths, forward-looking organizations also engaged in innovative learning—learning capable of bringing change, renewal, restructuring, and problem reformulation (Bennis and Nanus 1985). Innovative learning represented the creation of new organizational legacies. It might have been extremely difficult for a public policy education project staff to determine in advance what new organizational legacies would be created in a project. Yet many projects were able to articulate desired changes for coalition members during the beginning phases of their work. Such articulation signaled interest in innovative learning—in new legacies—and such interest could be sought in advance.

The plate passed around and we didn't put anything in it. I felt bad.

—coalition member, commenting on lack of funds to continue the project

We'll be here a long time after Kellogg's just a corn flake again.

—coalition member, commenting on the expected longevity of their coalition

THE IMPACT OF DIALOGUE

A CASE STUDY

The conversation started slowly and awkwardly. Jenny Carpenter, the discussion leader, read the first question: "Should sound environmental practices be required for farm program participation?" After some uncomfortable silence, Ben Gearhart, a grain and livestock farmer, said, "We're already using them. It's driven some of the poorer farmers out of business." No one else spoke. A resource economist from the university, in an effort to be helpful, suggested expanding the question to refer to *additional* environmental constraints. Charlie Harrison, an agricultural agent with Cooperative Extension, mentioned LISA. Jenny asked for a definition, but no one replied. A representative of a food processors' trade association said farmers used to do more environmental damage than they do now, and Harrison told a story about someone using diesel fuel to kill weeds in a church parking lot. The conversation wasn't going anywhere.

Ten individuals had gathered in a hotel meeting room for a roundtable discussion on the environment. It was a diverse group—Jenny; the economist from the university; two leaders from the League of Women Voters; Gearhart and another farmer; the extension agent; an officer of the Sierra Club; the trade association representative; and a secretary to take notes.

Jack Kinney, the second farmer in the group, said he thought sound environmental practices should be required, but the requirements need to be easy to understand. Jenny tried again to get someone to define LISA, but the proenvironment statement from Kinney, a farmer, had apparently initiated a shift in the conversation. Linda Goldstein, one of the members of the League of Women Voters, was the first environmentalist to speak up. She said she thought the issue was broader and involved implications for the larger environment. Gearhart rephrased her comment to make sure he understood it, and then Kinney said, "We need education. Farmers can see soil erosion, but we can't see chemical runoff. If we did, we'd be better stewards. I'm wasting money if the chemicals wash away." Goldstein, troubled by what seemed to be a narrowly economic outlook, said, "There are groundwater risks, too, not just financial ones!" And then Gearhart jumped in again. "Farmers are consumers, too," he said. "My well is only 22 feet deep. My family drinks that water! Don't think I'm not concerned if my farming practices contaminate the groundwater!"

Kathy Olmstead, another environmentalist, then spoke up. "Farmers know more about pesticides and soil erosion than I do. But what I'm concerned about is how to make sure that compliance is going to happen. I agree with the importance of protecting property rights, but the rule has to be that the farmer can't do harm that extends off the farm." Kinney, implying he'd heard that argument before, said, "Okay, but I still say the rules have to be specific. We need clear direction." Olmstead, sensing a confrontation, backed off a bit—saying, "I was just throwing something out"—and the conversation turned to other topics.

Before time ran out, the group went on to talk about participation in commodity programs, alternate cropping systems, the pros and cons of buying locally, and the conservation reserve program. Throughout the conversation, they continued to be careful with one another—verbalizing agreement with individuals on the other side of the issue, saying things in joking ways, and backing off if anyone seemed to be getting angry. But they were not just placating one another. Individuals on both sides were adamant about certain points such as the unacceptability of unclear regulations to the farmers and the environmentalists' determination to keep pressing for control of agricultural pollution. Scattered conversations continued in the meeting room and hallway as the meeting broke up.

* * *

The roundtable discussion was part of a series sponsored by a project in Illinois called Agriculture and Food Policy in an Interdependent World. The project was carried out by Cooperative Extension and the League of Women Voters. Roundtable discussions were held in fall 1989 at four locations around the state, covering issues related to the 1990 farm bill—international trade, commodity programs, and food programs as well as the environment. The project also sponsored a statewide follow-up conference a year later. The goal was to foster dialogue about food and agriculture issues between rural and urban citizens.

Such dialogue does not happen by accident. In this case, extension and the league were ideal partners to make something different happen. "We could not have done it

without the league," said Sandra Erikson, the project leader from extension, a faculty member in agricultural economics at the state university. "I had good knowledge of the agriculture community and contacts in downstate Illinois. Meg's contacts with nonfarm organizations and in the Chicago area were invaluable, and the league's name helped promote the project." These complementarities were useful in forming a steering committee for the project, recruiting discussion leaders for the roundtables, and ensuring the desired mix of roundtable and conference participants. Getting adequate nonfarm participation was one of the biggest challenges. Meg said, "I made 20 phone calls for every nonfarm person who actually attended."

Extension and the league—Sandra and Meg—also complemented one another in their mix of technical knowledge and process skills. Organizers decided early on that the project should concentrate on facilitating communication between farm and nonfarm interests, but they recognized that a certain amount of information also needed to be provided. Meg admitted to knowing little or nothing about agriculture when the project began, but she had a background in speech and communication and had developed excellent process skills in her work with the league. "Sandra developed the background materials," Meg said, "while I worked on design of the meetings and on recruiting discussion leaders." Keynote and luncheon speakers were also selected for the roundtables, and a resource person was assigned to each discussion group. The follow-up conference also emphasized the provision of information through speakers and panels. On the process side, Meg also prepared a handbook and conducted an orientation session for the discussion leaders, and a breakout session for small-group discussion was included in the conference.

* * *

What impact did the project have? "It had a great impact on me," said Libby Becker, the recently appointed head of a state agency. She had been a discussion leader at one of the roundtables. "I was a discussion leader for a group on environmental issues. That had not been my choice. I was more interested in international trade. But I learned a lot in preparing for the discussion and also from the different participants in the roundtable, especially the environmentalists. I then became a member of the governor's transition team, serving on a committee that included the environment. I was able to handle issues better in setting policy recommendations for the governor. Now that I'm in state government, we have environmental programs in our agency, and we deal with other agencies and the legislature on environmental issues. I would not have been as well prepared if I had not participated in the roundtable. I am more open to other sides of environmental issues than other directors of my agency have been, and the roundtable definitely had an influence on that."

Project evaluations indicated that participants in the roundtables and conference gained useful information from the background materials and speakers. They also felt that participation was worthwhile for hearing others' opinions and that their own perspectives on the issues had been affected. Both environmentalists and farmers indicated they had learned something about the other side. Some were alarmed to find the disagreements bigger than they expected, whereas others became more optimistic about prospects for mutually agreeable solutions. A prominent speaker at one of the roundtables said he was going to inform the U.S. secretary of agriculture about the degree of interest in environmental issues demonstrated at the roundtables, and a congressional staff person had previously told Sandra, "If you can get farm and environmental interests to agree on anything, we'd be very interested."

But Kathy Olmstead said the project had no impact on her at all. "I am from an Illinois farm family. I have some experience with these issues. I know what farmers are doing out there. And I'm a fierce advocate for environmental law and regulation. What was I going to learn? Why was this dialogue going to change anyone's mind? Even if I were going to change my perspective, one person from my organization would not change the organization's position." Kathy had been a member of the project's advisory committee. "I had advocated for a more aggressive, clearer goal than education. The goal should have been to solve a problem—to come up with a new, joint perspective. They were trying to foster dialogue, but not to foster a solution. People at the events were not going to change. To just have dialogue isn't worth it, just for the sake of talking. The roundtables were not reaching out to a general audience. The players involved had set positions already. The project should be bringing in politicians, who may not have the breadth and depth of knowledge on the issues."

Others shared some of Kathy's dissatisfaction. Some said there was too much sharing of ignorance in the roundtables; others, that many participants were already knowledgeable and those who really needed to learn were not present; still others felt that not enough would really happen as a result of the events. For most, the positive value of the events outweighed the failures, but their critical comments, like Kathy's, are food for thought for future projects.

CONCLUSIONS

The projects that we studied were part of an ongoing process of helping educators in extension and other organizations to facilitate the understanding and resolving of contentious public issues. Our purpose in this concluding chapter is to fit the lessons learned from these projects into this ongoing process. What advances have been made since these projects were completed? What further lessons have been learned? What gaps and needs remain?

- ***Coalition building and maintenance*** (Chapter 2) Building and maintaining coalitions, especially regarding education about public issues, is currently receiving a lot of attention (Cooley, Duncan, and Burridge 1994; Public Issues Education Materials Task Force 1994). The distinction between educational and political coalitions (initially pointed out by staff in the Groundwater Policy Education Project) has been sharpened. Political coalitions whose memberships represent multiple perspectives ("consensus-seeking" coalitions) are considered desirable for public issues education, whereas more narrowly based political coalitions ("advocacy" coalitions) are considered hazardous to effective, balanced education (Dale 1993; Hahn 1994; Public Issues Education Materials Task Force 1994). As Dale (1993) points out, educational coalitions with membership inclusive of all points of view on an issue sometimes have mutual education as a goal (similar to or the same as consensus-seeking coalitions).

  We argue, however, that educational coalitions do not need to be inclusive to be useful. Moreover, they do not even need to exist in the formal sense, as long as the resources they provide can be obtained in other ways (as discussed in Chapter 2). What is critical is the ability to implement educational programs that are fair and respectful of divergent interests and viewpoints, tap the needed resources, and communicate and work with diverse individuals and organizations.

- ***Implementation of educational programs*** (Chapter 3) Several themes related to implementation continue to be important.

  1. An immense amount of attention has been paid to *dialogue* in recent years. Major efforts have been made to provide extension educators with knowledge and skills related to dispute resolution, including a national videoconference, a workshop at the 1993 National Public Policy Education Conference, and inclusion in new printed materials for in-service education (Sachs et al. 1993; Danielson and Garber 1994; Faas 1994; Jones 1994; Public Issues Education Materials Task Force 1994). Other dialogue formats (Dale 1993) receiving attention by extension educators are the Kettering Foundation's National Issues Forums (Garkovich 1994); study circles as promoted by the Study Circles Resource Center in Pomfret, Vermont; and the "Citizen Politics" approach advocated by Harry Boyte and Project Public Life at the University of Minnesota. Increased attention is also given to the *process* of discussion and issue resolution as an alternative or supplement to *content*, as well as continued reminders that educators should not overlook content in the rush to learn process skills and techniques (Flinchbaugh 1994). The emphasis on dialogue and process is seen as a way of extending educators' roles beyond the traditional alternatives-and-consequences model to include assistance in the decision-making and implementation stages (Danielson and Garber 1994; Faas 1994).

  2. Empowerment is frequently discussed, although not always with the same meaning we gave it in Chapter 3. The notion of extending the educators' role into decision making and implementation is sometimes referred to as empowerment. In this view, the three "modes" of public policy education that we identified in Chapter 3 are treated as a sequence of developmental steps—information provision, followed by dialogue (the chance to exchange views), and then empowerment (taking action). Although such an interpretation makes sense, we believe it diverts attention from the more important point that we wanted to make. Our definition of empowerment—the involvement of people *affected by public issues but neither involved nor adequately represented in the policy-making process*—appears to be a topic on which there is too little experience among public policy educators and too few lessons.

  3. Too little attention is given to the role of content. In Chapter 3, we argued that content as well as process was important in education about public issues. Here we add that content should be incorporated in dialogue and empowerment modes and not confined to information provision. Lessons are needed for content specialists—educators who are experts in the subject matter of particular issues; many of the project leaders were content specialists rather than "process types" (such as leadership development or

community development specialists). Important lessons were undoubtedly learned by those individuals on how to provide content in the context of public issues. In hindsight, we wish we had made more inquiries about those lessons in our interviews. Fortunately, content specialists in other projects are continuing to learn and document lessons (e.g., Wolfe et al. 1993). Such individuals would benefit from increased opportunities to talk to and learn from one another about the common challenges of doing their work in the public arena. Process specialists could also help by talking with content specialists and compiling their lessons.

4. Another topic receiving increased attention is linkages formed between educators and the news media to bring a more complex understanding of public issues to a larger audience. This was a workshop topic at the 1993 National Public Policy Education Conference (Valenti 1994) and is a major priority of the Kettering Foundation. To our knowledge, however, actual experiences from which to draw lessons continue to be limited.

5. The education-advocacy debate seems to have cooled. The topic is still discussed, of course, and warnings are issued regularly about the dangers of narrow advocacy. Simultaneously, the language of balance and fairness that we suggested in Chapter 3 is used frequently (e.g., Dale 1993). Most importantly, people on both sides of the education-advocacy debate are now more likely to give reasons for their positions (e.g., Hite 1993; House 1993). They now bring to more conscious and deliberate attention questions such as which stance is more ethical, which is more effective educationally, and what are the implications of either stance for our organizations. We consider this a beneficial development.

- ***Impacts of education about public issues*** (Chapter 4) Much work remains to be done on this point. We think there is a tendency to report anecdotes more often—to treat them as legitimate evidence—but not necessarily to follow up such evidence with additional questions, as suggested in Chapter 4. We have only limited evidence of increased attention to evaluation of education about public issues (Public Issues Education Materials Task Force 1994). There may be increased tendency to include impacts on issues or on the process among project goals, but serious efforts to evaluate such impacts have not yet come to our attention. It is possible that relevant evaluation work is being done but simply never gets widespread attention. Summarizing and drawing lessons from such evaluations would be a valuable contribution to the practice of education about public issues.

Given the magnitude of the problem with politics that we summarized at the beginning of this report, the efforts made by educators to date are only small steps. But they clearly seem to be steps in the right direction. They are relevant and effective efforts to address issues and problems of great importance in a democratic society. Valuable lessons can be learned from continued innovation and experimentation. Experiences and lessons need to be documented and shared with other educators, and the purposes, practice, and accomplishments of education about public issues need to be communicated to a larger audience of citizens and policymakers. Our study of the eleven Kellogg- and Farm Foundation–supported projects has left us even more convinced than we were at the outset about the importance of evaluation in developing and enhancing the capacity of educators to meet these challenges.

APPENDIX: METHODOLOGY

This cluster evaluation used a case study approach. Through methods that engaged us firsthand with the people, materials, and events of the eleven projects, we sought, first, to understand the story of each project's genesis, implementation, challenges, and successes. Second, via an ongoing comparative analysis of these individual stories, we sought to extract broader understandings of pivotal elements of effective public policy education. Our overall purpose—derived from interactions with the W. K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF) and the projects—was to probe for important lessons to be learned from this cluster of projects.

EVALUATION QUESTIONS

We derived the specific questions for our cluster evaluation from interactions with WKKF and project staff at the outset of our work, especially at the first cluster "networking conference" organized and sponsored by the foundation. These questions therefore reflect the combined interests of the foundation and the organizations and individuals participating in these eleven projects. The specific focus on coalitions represents primarily the foundation's interest in receiving substantive feedback on the meaningfulness and importance of coalitions for public policy education. As will be recalled, this cluster was funded with a coalition requirement.

We used three basic questions to guide our cluster evaluation over the three years of the projects:

1. What is the nature, character, and meaningfulness of the coalitions formed in this public policy education cluster? In what ways did the coalitions relate to or affect project implementation and outcomes, including outcomes for individuals and for participating organizations and including project sustainability? Specifically, in what ways did project designs, implementations, or outcomes differ because of the coalition requirement?

2. What were the outcomes of the projects? Specifically, what changes were demonstrated in the (a) knowledge, skills, or public policy involvement of individual project *participants*; (b) evolution of the policy *issues* addressed in the projects, e.g., the infusion of a wider range of perspectives into the public debate; and (c) *policy process* itself, that is, who participates and how is diversity valued?

3. What were the character and success of the various educational strategies used in this cluster? Were there any important contextual factors for these projects, and, if so, what was the nature of their influence? Further, what were the linkages between project educational strategies and contextual factors, and project coalitions and outcomes?

Befitting a case study approach, the meaning and significance of these questions evolved as issues of particular salience to these projects emerged. For example, within our emphasis on educational strategies, one focus became the nature and balance of projects' attention to issues of public policy content versus process. Similarly, within the coalitions question, another focus became the rationale for the formation of coalitions, or why those particular organizations had come together to address a public policy issue.

TEAM APPROACH

Another major feature of our cluster evaluation was our team approach, which had two dimensions.

The first represented our planned coordination with the project-level evaluators. In the original plan, responsibility and authority for collecting information related to the major evaluation questions were divided between the cluster evaluators and the project-level evaluators. This was done to minimize duplication of effort and data collection burdens, while maximizing the value of the information to be collected for both the individual projects and the overall cluster. Specifically, the cluster evaluators were responsible for addressing the coalitions evaluation question. Regarding the project outcomes question, project evaluators were to address unique outcomes. Common outcomes were to be addressed via a coordinated, cross-project data collection effort directed by the cluster evaluators working in collaboration with the project evaluators. Similarly, data collection on project implementation and context was envisioned as a shared responsibility. The working group for this cluster evaluation would be a team made up of the cluster evaluators and all project-level evaluators.

In actuality, this team did not materialize, primarily because most of the eleven projects did not have a separate project-level evaluator. In most projects, one or more staff members also served as the project evaluators. This blurring of program development and critique roles precluded a separate, distinctive emphasis on the latter in our own interactions with project staff. The major implications of this general absence of a strong evaluation presence at the project level concerned data collection on project outcomes, as discussed later.

The second dimension was a team of cluster evaluators. Our team had four members: one faculty member with expertise in public policy education and in extension education; one faculty member with expertise in program evaluation; and two doctoral students with developing expertise in evaluation and/or policy education. Three of the four team members remained with the cluster evaluation from start to finish, whereas one of the student slots turned over three times during the three-year inquiry period (July 1989 through August 1992). Most importantly, much of our analytic work was accomplished during our regular interactive team meetings. We intentionally used each other's perspectives, insights, and voices to try to understand what we were learning and to reflect on its public importance.

A CASE STUDY APPROACH TO CLUSTER EVALUATION

Our approach sought to understand each project's story and to use such understanding as the basis for cross-project analysis of major themes, patterns, and lessons learned.

Overall Evaluation Design

This case study approach is grounded in an interpretivist logic of justification for evaluation (Guba and Lincoln 1989; Smith 1989). In this framework, emphasis is placed on what is meaningful to people in a given situation or context. Interpretivists assume that what is meaningful will vary across situations and across people within a situation. Diversity is valued, and multiple perspectives on and understandings of a given phenomenon are sought. These characteristics were well matched to the expected character of the public policy education projects in this cluster.

At the outset of the cluster evaluation, teams of one faculty member and one graduate student were formed for each project. The teams worked with that project throughout the inquiry period, enabling the development of trust and openness in relationships between project staff and cluster evaluators.

Data Collection

We used three major forms of data collection: site visits; collection and review of project documentation; and several more structured, supplementary data collection forms and surveys.

Site visits. Teams made site visits to each project at least once during each of the three years of the cluster evaluation. Some projects were visited more than once each year. Each visit lasted two to four days, the longer visits occurring toward the end of the inquiry period.

During the first year, site visits were aimed at developing a solid project description. Toward that end, the teams interviewed project staff, coalition members, members of project advisory or management or materials development committees, people from the sponsoring organizations, and others important to the project's initiation and design. Project sites were visited and observations conducted. These observations contributed to understanding the projects' context, design, initial implementation, challenges, and limitations.

Site visits during the second year again included interviews with project staff, coalition members, and other key project players, both new and old. These interviews focused on updating project descriptions and pursuing emerging themes of importance. These themes were selected in the year two networking conference of all project directors, sponsored by the WKKF. Some of the year two themes were also pursued by observing projects during site visits. In particular, observations concentrated on (1) documenting and gathering varied perceptions of actual project events (such as conferences, roundtable discussions, training sessions, public forums, and "riverwalks") and (2) deepening our understanding of coalition dynamics and their relationships to decision making as manifested in staff, steering committee, or coalition meetings.

Year three site visits were more tailored to each individual project. Project and coalition members were again interviewed, and a concerted effort was made to interview actual project participants to collect firsthand perceptions of the success and meaningfulness of project activities. We conducted both group interviews with representative groups of participants and telephone interviews with cross-sections of participants. Certain project events or meetings were also observed.

During all site visits, teams recorded each interview and observation in a data log, including the interviewer/observer's methodological and analytic comments. All logs were initially prepared by one team member and then reviewed for completeness and accuracy by the other team member. These logs formed the basic raw data for the cluster evaluation.

Collection and review of project documentation. The cluster evaluators tried, mostly successfully, to collect extensive documentation from each project. Specifically, we sought copies of all materials developed, minutes from project and coalition meetings, internal memos, relevant external correspondence, annual reports to WKKF, evaluation data and reports, news stories and press releases, and anything else of relevance to the evaluation questions. Such project documentation was intended to fulfill a largely descriptive and supportive role in the evaluation. Our

review of each project's documents aided substantially in developing a comprehensive descriptive portrait of each one.

There are two limitations to this data collection strategy. First, we relied on project staff to share their documentation. Most did, but in a few cases, we lacked backup substantiation of interview claims. Second, because project-level evaluators were not a separate group in this cluster, project-level evaluation data were uneven at best. In particular, our plans to work collaboratively with project-level evaluators on the collection of common outcome data were not fulfilled.

Supplementary data collection methods. During the second year, we collected additional data using three more structured methods. Each was designed to fill a perceived gap in our emerging understanding of projects, themes, and lessons.

- An outcomes matrix was designed to address the absence of project-level outcome data. The rows of this matrix constituted four groups of project objectives—for coalition members, for participants, for the issue, and for the policy process. These four groups reflected all written objectives in all project proposals. Space was also provided for objectives that emerged after the initiation of the project. The columns of the matrix requested project staff to identify which objectives were relevant to their project and to provide or reference (as in an annual report) data relevant to the accomplishment of that objective. We had hoped that, given the organization of these data in a consistent format, we would be able to aggregate across projects and make some summary assessments. Unfortunately, the matrix did not work as designed. Although most project staff completed and returned it, they provided little actual data for us to aggregate. For some projects the matrix was premature because they did not yet have specific outcome information. Other projects were highly inconsistent in what they provided. Some were cautious and conservative in backing all their claims with specific evidence. Others were expansive and vague, offering only general references to data sources.

  The absence of credible data plagued other aspects of our cluster evaluation. Future public policy education clusters should be designed to avoid this problem.

- A mailed survey of involved individuals and groups. This survey evolved from a recognition that, in many projects, important contributions were being made by individuals without official status in or connections to the project, such as an informal set of advisers. We believed that understanding the perceptions of these individuals would help us develop a fuller picture of each project. Thus we elicited nominations of samples from project staff and designed and mailed a survey to these samples. The survey asked for respondents' views on the nature and extent of their project involvement and on the project itself. A respectable response rate of about one-third was attained on this survey, and the results were used generally as intended.

- A materials review process. This was conducted to elicit experts' views of the quality and balance of the various materials developed by the projects. This effort reflects the tensions between education and advocacy in public policy education. We wanted expert opinion on the kind and degree of advocacy bias that might be present in the projects' materials. A panel of three outside reviewers with diverse expertise was identified, a materials review form developed, samples (as needed) of materials selected, and a mailed review process implemented in which each set of materials was reviewed by two experts. The results of this external review were enlightening and extremely useful for our understanding of the issues involved.

  A separate summary of each of these more structured data collection efforts was also prepared.

Data Analysis

The data analyses in the cluster evaluation proceeded over the course of the evaluation from descriptive emphases to identification of themes to interpretations of key lessons learned.

The data analysis took the same form each year. At the end of the every year, descriptive case summaries were prepared for each project, integrating all the data collected for that project that year. For the second and third years, this involved updating the prior year's descriptive summary. Then, each year a cross-project analysis was conducted. For year one, this analysis followed an inductive, category-generation process and yielded a comprehensive set of categories for the cluster (e.g., "rationale for coalition formation" and "materials emphasis in project design"). In the second year, the analysis focused on selected analytic themes, developed via analytic memos. In the third and final year, the analysis focused on assessing the nature and quality of relationships among key cluster themes.

It was advantageous for the cluster evaluation team that the annual Fa..n Foundation public policy education conference was held in September, just as our project years were ending. During years one and especially two of the cluster evaluation, one evaluator took the leadership to prepare a paper for this conference that offered a reflective

status report of our work. Other team members contributed reviews and commentaries. This opportunity to reflect on our work contributed to a more thoughtful and useful set of insights in the end. The only risk was that of becoming so enamored with emerging insights that they constrained or limited future information gathering and reflection on these projects.

Data Quality

We are confident that our work meets the relevant quality criteria for interpretivist case study evaluation offered by Guba and Lincoln (1989). Specifically, we believe our findings are (1) *credible* in that they are perceived as appropriate and accurate representations of actual project experiences and meanings by project people; (2) *confirmable* in that they represent the voices we heard, in harmony with—not dominated by—our own views and values; and (3) *dependable* in that they emanate from professionally sound and defensible methodological decisions.

We satisfied these inquiry criteria primarily via ongoing internal team collaboration and external communication with project and coalition people. Internally, we made inquiry decisions, developed insights, probed emerging themes, formulated lessons—all collaboratively with intentional challenge, critique, and review. In parallel fashion, we shared our work with all project personnel, repeatedly inviting and receiving their critique, reflections, and insights.

Reporting

Major vehicles for sharing our insights, ideas, and decisions with project and foundation staff included writing regular progress reports (three to four times a year), offering descriptive case summaries and data logs to interested project staff, routinely sharing copies of our reports and papers, and developing special reports and items for discussion at the annual networking meetings organized by the foundation.

CONFIDENTIALITY

All data were collected using approved procedures for protecting the privacy of the human participants. Specifically, all respondents were offered full information about the evaluation and their participation in it, were asked for their voluntary participation, and were ensured that their individual responses would be kept wholly confidential.

At the stage of reporting, all project directors were contacted and asked for permission to use actual organizational names in this report. Permission was granted from all eleven projects. Individual identities, however, remain confidential. In this report, all individual names mentioned are pseudonyms, and most are a composite of several individuals.

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